



The  
Making of a Gentleman

# The Making of a Gentleman

*by*

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*More brain, O Lord, more brain! or we shall mar  
Utterly this fair garden ~~we might win.~~*

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TO

SIR WILLIAM NEVILL GEARY, BART.

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## INTRODUCTION

IT is under the stress of direst emotion that our profoundest instincts come to the surface. A man, having been knocked into the gutter by a passing motorist, has picked himself up with bones unbroken, but feelings that it is agony to suppress. He advances to the side of the now stationary car. What then? Will there burst from his lips some such rebuke as, "Your conduct is unworthy of a Christian"? or "Is that your idea of loving your neighbour"? And were he to launch such a thunderbolt, would it have the annihilating, or infuriating, effect in a Christian community that alone would make it worth the launching? To ask such a question is to answer it.

But let our aggrieved victim flare out with, "Can't you imitate the manners of such gentlemen as you may have met?" or, less obscurely, "You damned road-hogging cad, you!" and the most gratifying reaction in the way of personal abuse or assault, can be guaranteed. The plain fact of the matter is that the adversary, if he is anything like an average specimen of his time and class, believes in this, that, or the other—if he believes in any—version of Christianity, with the conscious and formal surface of his mind, while deep down in the hidden places of his soul reposes the certainty that the one thing needful, the first and great commandment, is comprehended in these five words,

"Thou shalt be a gentleman."

All of which may be as regrettable as you please; but we do not need to like a thing in order to make

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it worth investigating. And this unformulated cult of the gentleman is surely a fact of present-day life whose importance can hardly be over-rated.

But it also happens to be one on whose candid discussion there is a taboo. Showmen are not encouraged in the precincts of shrines, and there are parts of the mind as well as the body that decency forbids us to uncover. Or if not decency, at least prudence. For there is a veto, in genteel society, on the exposure of its foundations.

The continuity of the social order is dependent upon good will, and good will is largely a matter of habit. Whether or not it is true that the average Englishman loves a lord, there can be no doubt of his liking, and respect for, whatever he associates with the name of gentleman. It is a feeling akin to his cult of royalty, which is immeasurably stronger than in any days of so-called divine right, and allows him to envisage his Sovereign as the supremely representative and ideal gentleman.

There are repressions of the crowd as well as of the individual; tacit conspiracies to keep certain topics below the surface of the social consciousness, to let dormant beliefs lie. We are the devout yes-men of our creeds and formulas, and the tactless intruder, who comes butting in with his insistent "Why? why? why?," has only himself to blame if his case is dealt with after the precedent of *Demos v. Socrates*.

The hemlock is no longer necessary. It is enough to brand the violators of taboo with the abhorred epithet "snob." He who talks about gentlemen, it is agreed, is none; unless, indeed, he does so in terms of conventional platitude, in which "gentleman" becomes

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an otiose synonym for "good man"—a paragon of all the virtues, even the deadliest. As, for instance, in a three volume novel by an authoress of 1890, we read how,

"Lord Badlesmere walked slowly up to Tom and laid his hand on his shoulder. 'There never was but one perfect gentleman since the world began,' he said solemnly, 'and that was the Son of God.'"<sup>1</sup>

Though one rather fancies that such was only his Lordship's modest way of putting it, here is the concentrated essence of Victorian gentility, not excluding its heart-felt, though unacknowledged, reverence for aristocrats. It is one of the few Victorian attitudes that has not gone out of fashion.

If, therefore, I persist in defying an invisible, but unmistakable, stop light, I am entirely without defence. I have even been warned. Some years ago, when I had written what I hoped was a harmless and inoffensive account of the Victorian era, a distinguished critic and historian—for whose work in the latter capacity I have the greatest respect—went out of his way to honour me by devoting a full dress review article to my individual annihilation. The head and forefront of my offending appeared to be that I had recognized the existence, and even the importance, of a middle class in those days. And a middle class is one of those Victorian things that, like belly and trousers, used not to be quite nice to talk about, and, unlike them, is even less nice now.

But there it is. "Every man," as King Alfred says, "must speak what he speaks, and do what he does." About the ultimate grounds of faith, as of taste, there

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Mr. Smythe Palmer's extremely comprehensive anthology, *The Ideal of a Gentleman*,

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is no arguing. And if one's faith happens to consist in blurting out the truth, according to one's light, and damning the consequences, one ought to be only too grateful for living on that diminishing part of the earth's surface where one gets damned for this sort of offence in anything half so agreeable as a review.

Permit me, however, to say this, in mitigation of sentence. The author's mood is indicative. The imperative is for the reader, whose prerogative it is to draw the moral, if any. He has, as I conceive, a wide choice. It is equally open to him to deduce that the gentleman, both as a fact and an ideal, is an anti-revolutionary nuisance that ought to be liquidated as soon as possible; or, alternatively, that—in England at any rate—the fairest hope for civilization lies in the maintenance, the strengthening, and the extension of the ideal that we link with what Tennyson has called "that grand old name." It is entirely a question of the point of view. The only moral that I do not imagine could be drawn from any angle, is that the English gentleman—as he exists at present—is a perfect and flawless product, incapable of improvement. But then, what human product is?

The book consists of two parts. In the first I have concentrated upon the meaning of that most elusive word "gentleman," and tried to convey some notion not only of its workaday, but of its ideal significance. For the word is seldom used except in a mixture of both senses, of what a gentleman *is*, and of what he *ought* to be; and until we can discipline ourselves to think clearly on the subject, we are doomed to wander astray in the mists of sentimentality and the moonshine of platitude.

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In the second and larger part, I have done my best to tell the story of the gentleman—to write his biography as far as it has gone. Those readers who prefer a story to a philosophy are respectfully advised to reverse the logical order, and read the second part first. I can only hope that their interest will be sufficiently aroused to induce them to complete the journey—as it were—backwards.

I have only one thing to add. I have, in tracing the evolution of the gentleman, deliberately concentrated upon the line that leads up to the English gentleman. One sufficient reason is that even so, I have made the book bulkier than I had intended.





BOOK I

*WHAT MAKES A GENTLEMAN*



## CHAPTER I

### THE GRAND OLD NAME

It is never entirely safe to judge of a word by its original meaning. To walk into a village pub, and characterize your fellow toppers as a company of silly villains, though inoffensive philologically, might lend itself to misunderstanding. Man is entitled—if he can—to be the master and not the slave of his words, and so dispose and turn them as may seem best to his human convenience. And therefore, though we shall never get to the whole meaning of any word except in the light of its origin, it by no means follows that we are bound to interpret it in its original sense.

This is fortunate indeed when we come to deal with the word gentleman. For there is no doubt that in its original and literal sense, it was one that, as Lord Melbourne would have said, implied no damned nonsense about merit. The Latin word *gens* comes from an old Sanscrit root, that means “Begetting,” and, as the dictionary tells us, signifies a clan or a house, a sort of glorified family. The *gentilis*, or gentle man, is accordingly one who is begotten into its membership; as one might say, in the Highlands, that the tartan, or right to it, proclaims the gentleman. Which, indeed, it not infrequently does, in something more than the primitive sense.

The original gentleman of all, then, would seem to have qualified for the title by no greater merit than that of getting himself recognizably born. Your *gens*, your

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clan, might be good, bad, or indifferent—you were gentle so long as you belonged to it. Force of circumstances, however, caused the word to take on it a complimentary or disparaging sense, according to whether it was used domestically, in the sense of “scion,” or externally, in that of “clansman” or “tribesman.” The foreign *gentilis* signified to the Roman an untamed barbarian, one of the lesser breeds without the law; just as, to the Hebrew, the Gentile was an uncircumcised and unholy stranger. But within the Roman peace, to be gentle would mean to bear some probably ancient and honoured name, like Fabius or Claudius, and to bear it free from taint of ancestral slavery. Of these two senses, it was the complimentary one that was likely to survive, especially when Gothic, Frankish, and other outlandish gentlemen, had made themselves lords of whatever was left of Roman civilization in the West.

Thus to his original qualification of being recognizably born, the gentleman comes to add that of being well born. As he emerges from the chaos and ruin of the Dark Ages, and comes into the light of a new day as French *gentil homme*, Italian *gentil huomo*, Spanish *gentil hombre*, and finally, English gentleman, it is as the man of birth, one of a superior class.<sup>1</sup> In the jargon of our own day, the use of the word would have been described as wholly and entirely snobbish.

When the fires of class war were first kindled in fourteenth century England, the principal incendiary was one John Ball, a priest, who went about posing the conundrum,

<sup>1</sup> As indicated in Professor Alison Phillips's illuminating article in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th ed.).

## THE GRAND OLD NAME

When Adam delved, and Eve span,  
Who was then the gentleman?

or—as a modern agitator might put it—what price the nobs?

Now if the word gentleman had been thus appropriated for a class or caste badge, it is at least certain that neither this book, nor one remotely resembling it, would have borne such a name on the cover. You might as well expatiate on the making of the true Viscount, or of the essential Jones. At best you could trace the origin, vicissitudes, and fall of an order of gentlemen, as you might that of an order of Dukes, without any more regard to what is gentlemanly, than what is Dukish.

For our purpose it is necessary that a “gentle” should be addable to the “man” of those oft quoted lines

The rank is but the guinea’s stamp  
A man’s a man for a’ that.

In other words, the object of our quest is not the status, but the soul of the gentleman; not the letter or the law of his gentleness, but the spirit.

That spirit is of course far older, far more widespread than the name. Some breath of it must surely have been astir wherever men have joined together in any sort of society. The noble savage is no doubt a product of sentimental fiction; but the completely ignoble savage is perhaps a greater, because an inhuman, absurdity. The least civilized tribe must have associated a certain distinction of quality with superiority in status, even if this should only have taken the form of an aggravated ferocity, or a double charge of magic. After all, one expects something different of one’s leader, and in

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savage life, by dint of club or cooking pot, can usually go on eliminating till one gets it.

Just as our own kind of human being was at one time in competition with other quite distinct species of men, any one of which might conceivably have made good in the lordship of creation, so we shall find, side by side, a diversity of lines, along each of which some species of gentleman has evolved. But though it is by no means my intention to ignore these others, it is upon the kind designated by our own word, and its European equivalents, that our main interest will be centred, since, as I shall try to show, here we have the veritable *gentilis homo sapiens*, the highest evolutionary product, and the one with the greatest promise of approach to what we may conceive of as the ideal gentleman.

So far, however, we have only had to do with what we might describe as the purely formal or nominal gentleman. We have seen him surviving the civilization that bequeathed his name, and emerging from the flood of barbarism as the well born man, according to certain definite rules—emerging, it would seem, a little superfluously, as he bids fair to double the part of nobleman.

But almost from the first, we find the word beginning to take on an additional sense, not of the guinea's stamp, but of the guinea's value—in other words, gentleness becomes not only a status, but its appertaining quality. It is not enough to be born a gentleman—to whom much is given, from him shall much be required:

Truth, pity, freedom and hardiness,  
Of these virtues four who lacketh three  
He ought never gentleman called to be.

Which is a fourteenth-century way of saying—"gentle

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birth is not enough to make a gentleman." But in what may still be described as the youth of our English word, we find a still more startling suggestion, to the effect that birth may at a pinch be dispensed with altogether, and that any one whatever who behaves like a gentleman *is* a gentleman. An idea so far advanced beyond the common thought of its age, is one that we might expect to find conceived in the brain of that age's most fruitful genius. Which is precisely what we do find—so far at least as England is concerned. It is Dan Chaucer, the man who put English on to the map of European literature, who gives voice clearly—and more than once—to the conception of gentleness itself, apart from birth, as the one thing needful for the making of a gentleman, a quality that no blood can transmit, one that must be conquered afresh in each new generation.

Let sire be never so noble,  
And, but his heir love virtue, as did he,  
He is nought gentle, though he rich seem,  
Al (though) wear he sceptre, crown, or diadem.

Of even more decisive significance are some lines of Chaucer's own, that he interpolates with his translation of that classic of European chivalry, called the *Roman de la Rose*:

When such a one thou seest thee biforn,  
Though he be not gentle born,  
Thou mayest well say . . .  
That he is gentle, because he doth  
As longeth to a gentleman.

Which is the same as to say, "Gentle is as gentle does," or as Chaucer himself puts it, through the mouth of that

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immortal virago, the Wife of Bath—a shrewd judge if ever there was one—

“He is gentle that doth gentle deeds.”

But Chaucer, at the height of his inspiration, was enough of a seer to be in advance not only of his own age, but almost of ours. Certainly to the ordinary intelligence of his contemporaries, the idea of a gentleman not qualified by gentle birth would have seemed as sheer a contradiction in terms as that of Marjorie Fleming’s monkey:

He is a very pretty woman.

Not even the divine merits of our Saviour would have sufficed to elevate Him to the plane of gentility, in the opinion, at any rate, of Dame Juliana Berners, a sporting and literary lady who would appear to have been Prioress of Sopwell near St. Alban’s, and whose writings made her a recognized authority on hawking, hunting and heraldry, during the fifteenth century.

“Christ,” she explains, or, as she calls him elsewhere, “that gentleman Jhesus,” “was a gentleman of His mothers’ behalf, and bare coat armour of ancestors.” The apostles were equally select, being lineal descendants of the Maccabees who had “fallen to labours and were called no gentlemen.” It has even been suggested that this was the original significance of “gentle Jesus.”

For centuries, in fact, after Chaucer, one can safely say that it did not occur to one person in ten thousand to doubt that the word gentleman, whatever else it might convey, remained true to its origin, as formulated by the massive commonsense of Dr. Johnson—surely the least snobbish Englishman that ever breathed:



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"That is, *homo gentilis*, a man of ancestry. All other derivations seem to be whimsical." To rub it in still further, we find the Doctor defining gentlefolk as "persons distinguished by their birth from the vulgar," and lastly a "gentle" as "(1) A gentleman; a man of birth. Now out of use. (2) A particular kind of worm."

But though birth might be essential to the making of a gentleman, it did not follow that it could make a complete gentleman. Though it was long before the time would be ripe for dispensing altogether with the blood test, the word—in that mysterious way words have—gathered to itself fresh associations. More and more it came to be felt that an English gentleman was subtly different in kind from a nobleman, and—more subtly still—from a *gentil homme*, or any other of his dictionary equivalents overseas. The emphasis was less on hereditary or heraldic qualifications, than on a standard of behaviour, or the inward grace of which that behaviour was the token.

It is thus that when we read in Hall's Chronicle, one of Shakespeare's historical sources, how the Butcher Lord Clifford in his cold-blooded murder of the young Duke of Rutland, was accounted a tyrant and no gentleman, we almost feel ourselves in the presence of the great genteel taboo—"This is not done."

The really vital question, on which everything else depended, was whether the status of gentleman should become capable, like that of nobleman, of precise and rigid definition; whether the gentry should form a closed circle of privileged and superior beings, concentric with the peerage, though of wider radius. If this had been accomplished, the development of the

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inner or ideal gentleman would have been fatally handicapped. Whether or not a man was a gentleman could have been determined, once and for all, by reverence to the Debrett's *Blood Gentle* that would have formed a companion volume to his *Peerage*, until such time as both were put out of date by process of revolution. If you can tell a man's quality at once by his attached label, few people will take the trouble to probe beneath the surface to find how far the description may or may not be justified.

On the other side of the Channel this was more or less what did happen. The *gentil homme* was the member of a noble caste, and his status was as exactly defined as that of any Baron or Marquis. By way of a label he prefixed his name with a *de*; he had his coat of arms, with the requisite allowance of quarterings. Outside his pale were the *bourgeois*, were the *canaille*—members of distinct and inferior species. Nor was his gentility only a source of empty honour. It exempted him from the attentions of the tax collector; it conferred on him, if not by law, by a universally recognized custom, the privilege of the duel with others of his kind. Whereby he succeeded so thoroughly in planting an inferiority complex in the souls of the inferior species aforesaid, that they worked it off in the fullness of time by consigning every gentleman, who could not get away, to the lantern or the guillotine.

How was it that this did not happen in England? For it did seem as if at one time a class of gentry was about to develop on Continental lines. The decisive step appeared to have been taken in the first year of King Henry V, when a statute was passed making it compulsory for every defendant in certain actions to

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declare his estate or mystery. As an immediate sequel to this we have the appearance of the first English gentleman, as by law defined, in the person of a certain Robert Erdeswyke, who was had up for housebreaking, wounding with intent to kill, and actually procuring the murder of a certain Thomas Page, who was cut to pieces while on his knees begging for mercy. Sir George Sitwell, to whose researches we owe the discovery of this father of English gentlemen, is confident that if an earlier claimant to the title can be discovered, he will prove to be of similar kidney, and qualified in like manner.

But even the High Court of Parliament could not turn aside the main stream of English development, which had already begun to hollow its channel through what, from the foreign standpoint, must have seemed low ground indeed. For the English spirit would appear to be invincibly opposed to the formation of privileged estates. There have been noblemen in England, but never a noblesse; gentlemen, but not the fiction of gentle blood of superior composition to ordinary blood and transmissible to offspring. Not without cause does that great legal luminary, John Selden, remark, "What a gentleman is, 'tis hard to define. In other countries he is known by his privileges; in Westminster Hall he is one that is reputed one. . . ."

That is typically English. English society is illogical in much the same sort of way as English thought; it can accept an idea without accepting its consequences, if these do not happen to suit it. Thus an Englishman is quite capable of talking about "persons distinguished by their birth from the vulgar," provided that he can postpone indefinitely the task of distinguishing them,

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or of formulating the exact principles on which he is to go about it.

It is easy enough to require a man to declare his estate, but if you do not bind him down to do this according to exact rule, you are allowing every man to become the fountain of his own honour, and dub himself gentleman at his own sweet will. The noble science of heraldry, instead of introducing order into the confusion, only made it worse confounded. For it was as simple as it was lucrative for those versed in its mysteries, to blazon entirely new coats of arms to fit the requirements of equally new gentlemen.

Thus, instead of the ordered clarity with which, in more logical countries, the *de's* and *von's*, and Dons were segregated from folk of baser blood, England had given herself over to an anarchy of undefined status that encouraged anyone at all near the social borderline, to claim and assume the style of gentleman. And since the prize in the game was no more tangible than prestige, the demand for a legally authoritative code of rules was not urgent.

Upon the other titles of honour, the lawyers and heralds got to work so effectually that there could be no doubt as to the exact number and identity of Dukes, Marquises, Earls and Barons. James I, in his canny Scots way, actually created another title, that of Baronet, in order to sell it for cash down; while his son, Charles I, hit upon the even more canny expedient of compelling every one legally eligible, to assume the dignity of knighthood, after paying the customary entrance fee.

But there was something different about the estate of gentleman, something that James I was hinting at

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when he replied to his old nurse, who was trying to put through a little job on behalf of her son :

"I'll mak' your son a baronet, gin ye like, Luckie; but the de'il himsel' could na' mak' him a gentleman."

A remark penetrating enough to be double edged. For behind the obvious and superficial interpretation, that it is possible to change a man's title, but not his blood, there is surely a dawning apprehension of the fact, that though it takes a King to make a commoner into a peer, there is no power on earth that can make a man into a gentleman, except that of his own spirit.

To say "His Grace is not a Duke," would be to give oneself the lie; but to say, "His Grace is not a gentleman" would mean something only too intelligible, of which even King James would seem to have had some dawning apprehension.

The word "gentleman," unlike the word "Duke," was in fact free; which meant that it could work out its own salvation, and meanwhile, in the wise, illogical English way, accommodate different meanings as easily as the same plant can flower on more than one stem.

We may regard it as a trinity of three meanings in one word—not co-equal and co-eternal, but each striving for the mastery, and meanwhile shading off into each other by imperceptible degrees. There is first the sense of a formal and legal status; the next that of gentle blood; and lastly that of the gentle soul and manners.

Of these the first has never, during the last three centuries, been a serious rival of the other two; though it has not, even to this day, finally given up the ghost. In a desperate effort to regularize the status of a gentleman, a formal title was annexed to it, that of Esquire,

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the next expansion of the circle of honour beyond that of knighthood. Even to-day those who understand or care about such things, can sort out of any company the elect few who, on ceremonial occasions, are entitled to rank as esquires. But in practice this dignity, being even more cheaply annexed than a coat of arms, soon became the perquisite of anyone who could induce his correspondents to put Esq. after, instead of Mr. before, his name on an envelope. Why it should be deemed more honourable to be called a knight's arm-bearer than a master, it would be unprofitable to speculate.

Formal status being thus ruled out for practical purposes, only two meanings of "gentleman" are left in the field, and between them it has been what Wellington would have called "a damned near run thing." Gentleness—is it out of the blood or of the spirit? Gentle birth or gentle manners—which is the first and essential requirement of a gentleman?

If we are to judge by common form, no clean-cut answer to this question would have been possible at any time in the last three hundred years. "Gentleman" has blended both meanings in proportions so subtle as to evade definition, and never quite the same from one utterance to another. No doubt the proportion allotted to birth has been steadily diminishing, but it is still far from having become negligible, and what has been lost to blood is by no means clear gain to spirit, since another factor, wealth, is more and more beginning to count in the vulgar interpretation of gentility. Who would refuse to the newest fledged millionaire the title of esquire, pending his proper money's worth of nobility!

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Light on this subject is obscured by the fact that the theory and practice of most people are flatly at variance. Men, and still more women, who, in intimate conversation, are prolific of such imputations as that of So-and-so not being out of the top drawer, not a sahib, quite quite, or quite a gentleman, will yet, if challenged in public, indignantly deny that they are capable of such snobbishness as that of perverting the grand old name into a shibboleth of class superiority.

For all that, the unqualified statement of Chaucer that "he is gentle that does gentle deeds," remains as far advanced as the Sermon on the Mount beyond the unspoken usage of our time. But in compensation we may reflect that such usage has never yet become fixed and petrified, where the English language is spoken. All is still malleable, and we are free to refashion the as yet incomplete idea of the gentleman, in the likeness of our own ideal.

*NAME AND IDEAL*

MANY years ago, when I was preparing for the press a bulky and immature history of English patriotism, that very great gentleman, the late Dr. C. R. L. Fletcher, was kind enough to look over and annotate some of the proofs. One of these notes particularly lingers in my memory. I had innocently recorded how "a gentleman, probably Creevey," had congratulated Wellington on the morrow of Waterloo. In the margin I found written, "No! Creevey was no gentleman," which caused me to insert the words "or more" before "probably."

But supposing I had been so pedantic as to stand by my original version, I might at least have contended that Dr. Fletcher being right did not prove me wrong. Creevey may have been indisputably a gentleman and palpably no gentleman, at one and the same time, according to which way you chose to look at it. If Creevey's double had flourished in the early years of this century, I am quite sure that Dr. Fletcher, with his sweet courtesy—the expression is characteristically his own—would have treated him, for most practical purposes, in the light of a gentleman. He would have written him down Esquire; and, if he had come to dine in Hall at New College, would have caused him to feel that he, Thomas Creevey, was cutting just the sort of figure that important men of affairs expect to cut among scholars. And yet, after the last port had been round, and the last tit bit of intimate scandal communicated, I can well imagine the distinguished historian



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heaving an immense and half-articulate sigh of relief at the guest's departure.

"I always thought that Creevey was no gentleman! Now I know it."

We shall save a great deal of slovenly thinking, and perhaps of ill feeling, if we resolve never to use the word without being quite clear in our minds which sort of a gentleman we have in view; whether our mood is colourless and detached, and we are talking about the workaday, imperfect gentleman as we might of any other variety of the human species; or whether, seldom without a certain warmth, we are standing for our own conception of the ideal or perfect gentleman, as we desire to see him.

It is in the first sense that we may be informed,

"A gentleman called Jones must have taken your umbrella" and decidedly in the second that we reply, "Jones—whoever he is—is no gentleman!"

It would be a comparatively simple matter if we were in a position to decide once for all, in which of the two senses our own "gentleman" is to be taken. But language is not thus to be commanded, and it is easier to make such promises than to keep to them. We shall have ample need and scope for both uses before we have done, and even to keep them apart will be none too easy, since both alike are rooted in the nature of the subject. Gentlemanliness is at once a fact and an ideal, the gentleman a phenomenon and a goal.

In the indicative mood, as one might phrase it, we have the gentleman by birth, a fact of nature, as palpable as an elm or an island; in the imperative, the gentleman as we long to see him, and as we aspire to make him, the man of gentle spirit and manners—less

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of a fact than a dream, the artist's vision of the statue in the marble.

But then—can we train our mind's eye to regard the rough hewn block in a spirit of uncreative detachment from the masterpiece it conceals? As long as man hides in his own breast the spark of potential godhead, so long will he feel the urge upon him to create. Let him propose what he will, the creative genius will dispose; and that spirit will inspire his language.

It is, of course, possible to enclose words in such a rigid and sealed framework of definition as to render them practically spirit proof. The isosceles triangle is to us what it was to Euclid; and the laws of the Medes and Persians are as those of Ireland, compared with that governing the composition of sulphuretted hydrogen. Something very like this threatened to be the fate of our word gentleman, so long as it remained enclosed in its original conception of birth. Birth is a thing that defines itself; no man can have more than two parents, and the identity of one of them, if not always beyond doubt, is in most civilized communities formally presumed.

What can ennoble sots, or slaves, or cowards?

Alas, not all the blood of all the Howards!

cries rhetorical Pope. But alas! the blood of the Howards, if transmitted in the right line of primogeniture, can make a nobleman of a sot—a description that would be substantially true of George IV's ducal bottle mate, "Jockey of Norfolk," who, on one famous occasion, having drunk himself to the quarrelsome stage, and called for his carriage to drive him home to his castle of Arundel, allowed himself to be driven round

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and round Brighton Pavilion, in a state of blissful acquiescence, until he was in a condition to be deposited at the starting point, and put to bed, as noble a Duke as ever wore strawberry leaves, but hardly, except by grace of Bacchus, an ideal nobleman.

If therefore we want scope for our conception of the gentleman to grow to its full emotional and ideal stature, it is obvious that we shall have to set it free from its original bondage to birth. It is not that ancestry need be ruled out altogether as a factor in his composition, but that ancestry is far from being the only, or even the determining factor. The way of birth is the way of petrification; a word that can be formalized as a title ceases to be alive.

And yet it would be an even more disastrous mistake to forget that a word, or an idea, if it is to grow at all, must grow from its own roots, and that to separate it from these only sets it free to die. That is what happens when idealism is carried so far, by pious sentimentalists, that they identify the gentleman with their ideal man and load him with all the good qualities they can possibly think of. The unfortunate word, thus cut loose from its natural associations, becomes a meaningless incantation, a platitudinous synonym for a good man or even a saint. The gentleman has, in fact, gained all the virtues by losing his proper identity and becoming somebody quite different, in which case he had better follow the example of certain initiates, and signalize his conversion by being baptised in another name.

For it takes more than the most finished gentleman to make a saint. Saint Francis was no doubt by nature, as he was by birth, a gentleman, but to say that he went about living the life of a gentleman, would be about as

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comprehensive as if one were to talk of Frederick the Great as that amateur violinist who used to perform at Potsdam. To take the extreme case of all, there are sceptics who would not turn a hair at denying the fact of the Crucifixion, but surely no one, sceptic or believer, who would so lose all sense of proportion as to describe it as the death of a gentleman.

But if it takes more than a gentleman to make a saint, it is equally true that there are saints and holy men whom it would be a preposterous stretching of language to describe as gentlemen. The two ideals notoriously fail to march in step. There are no doubt men who have shone with equal glory in both spheres; one has only to name Paul of Tarsus, Sir Thomas More, and the poet, George Herbert. But the very conspicuousness of these examples suggests their being something rather exceptional. The ordinary run of saint is perhaps too much wrapped up in his holiness, to have time for perfecting his manners. The elect cannot always have been the sweetest of company, even physically. And by their own account, they have seldom been in the habit of making themselves popular with the world.

It may be proof of original sin, but I fancy that ordinary human nature does find it a little against the grain to like, as well as respect, people of outstanding virtue.

"Said Mr. Love-lust 'I could never endure him.' 'Nor I,' said Mr. Live-loose, 'for he would be always condemning my way.'" And how, when one came to Vanity Fair for the glorious first time in the Child's Pilgrim's Progress, one's sympathy did go out to poor Mr. Live-loose! Those, we felt, would have been exactly our sentiments about the immaculate Faithful! We

knew exactly that type of grown-up, whose example was so notoriously godly, righteous, and sober, as to constitute a standing condemnation of our own way. And how different from the uncle, to whose proceedings one's elders and betters alluded in our presence with such intriguing reserve, but who was a jolly decent chap for all that!

To rise from one's own private experience to that of mankind at large—how thickly are the pages of history strewn with people of outstanding virtue, who seem to have been incapable of mastering the rudiments of gentlemanly conduct! The Prophet Samuel, for instance, another of our youthful *bêtes noires*, for the gift of whose heart and mind we were supposed to pray—if we must give him the title by courtesy, would at least qualify as about the most unpleasant old gentleman on record. Witness that little business of his carving up a prisoner of war; witness the whole story of his persecution and double crossing of the unfortunate King Saul, whose elevation above his own head the old prophet could evidently neither forget nor forgive; witness his final practical joke, after taking an affectionate farewell of the people, and making them think that it really was good bye at last—of conjuring up a storm to demolish their year's harvest! Even after death he remained true to form, oozing up in a mantle to make himself thoroughly unpleasant, for the last time, to poor Saul! And yet nobody has ever doubted Samuel's extreme holiness.

Let us pass two millenia and three centuries on, and come to one who, if not in the technical sense a holy man, was certainly a model to his age of the austere, Christian virtue—I mean Dante. And yet, if

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a prize were to be offered for the most caddish action ever performed, I fancy that, on the strength of his own account, this scion of a noble Florentine House could put in a pretty hopeful claim. The scene is the lowest circle of Hell; the poet is as anxious as any modern reporter to get an interview with a soul buried forever neck deep in ice; to loosen his tongue he swears to grant the favour of wiping away the frozen tears, so that the poor blinded wretch may for a few moments be free to weep; and then, when the question has been duly answered and the pitiful reward claimed, "stretch forth your hand! open my eyes!" there follow the frightful words, "and I did not open them; and it was courtesy to be rude to him."

One could go on indefinitely multiplying instances of the most exalted virtue conspicuously failing to make a gentleman of its possessor. But enough has been said to bring out the contrast between wider and narrower ideals, and to make it clear that the man of godly conduct and the man of gentle manners are by no means necessarily the same person.

This is not to say that the two ideals are incapable of being reconciled on the highest plane, or that the two paths may not ascend different sides of the same mountain, to the summit, where perfect saint is indistinguishable from perfect gentleman. But that does not prevent these paths from being entirely distinct, on these lower slopes from which even our vision of the summit is obscured. And if we, who have to start from the bottom, ignore the distinction, and oscillate uncertainly between the two, we shall wander off into the mist and never arrive anywhere.

Even when we talk of the ideal gentleman, we do

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not visualize a perfect and godlike being, without any sort of fault or flaw. We have in view a conceivably attainable ideal, a point of vantage that we can reasonably hope to achieve below cloud level; a point to which we can climb by the path whereon we have already started, and with whose lower reaches we are to some extent acquainted. That is to say we have to develop our ideal out of our actual and historic gentleman, and not by switching off to something totally different, however desirable in the abstract.

## MEN OF BREEDING

WE have seen how the idea of gentleness has its roots in that of gentle birth, and how this primitive limitation, unless it can be outgrown, will put an end to growth altogether. There can be no breach of continuity, no question of severing the plant from its roots and transferring it to different soil; what we have to do is to take that crude and embryonic notion of the *born man*, and see into what it can be developed; to strive after the gardener's vision of the flower in the seed—the fine flower of gentle life and manners.

It might help to clarify the situation if, in surveying these first groupings of our ancestors towards the discovery of the gentleman, we could find some answer to that typically modern question, "What's the idea?" What was at the back of their minds when they developed this term, which originally signified nothing more than membership of some family or clan, into a sort of certificate of superiority? What merit attaches to the born man from the mere fact of his being born?

To understand this, we shall have to look further back than to those comparatively sophisticated and civilized times in which our own word began to take shape. The deeper we penetrate below the surface of the primitive mind, the more complicated becomes the significance investing the idea of birth. To get oneself properly born would appear to have been at least half the battle of this temporal life, and perhaps the whole of that for eternal life. There are Polynesian



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islands where only chiefs and members of leading families were allowed the privilege of survival, and this would seem to have been the rule in the early phases of the great Egyptian civilization.

The whole primitive attitude on the subject of birth seems at the first blush like a crazy system of eugenics. There was literally nothing that could not be transmitted by descent, from magic to godhead. Mortals married divine beings who passed on to their descendants some superhuman quality or power; there were giants on the earth in those days, and miracle-working kings. The magic of birth was no empty phrase; it was, though invisible, as definite a capital as some fortunate infant of our own days may have to his account in the parental bank.

To be a gentleman, then, in the primitive sense of a "born man," was about the most important thing that anyone could be. Only by getting born properly, in most communities, could a man qualify for any function or privilege whatever. We read of one tribe of Indians where it was a family privilege to sing certain songs and to practice cannibalism; again of other families in other tribes where human flesh was under a hereditary taboo. We find chiefship and kingship descending not to the firstborn, but to some picked or elected scion of a particular stock. We find every sort of imaginative and artificial extension of this privilege of the "born man," culminating in that of the "twice born" and sacrosanct Brahman of the Hindu civilization.

Now what is the sense—if any—behind all this? If we are to take it all at its face value, and accept the explanations that have invariably been forthcoming

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from those who rule their lives by such notions, we should be inclined to answer, "none whatever." We have only a jumble of the wildest superstitions supported by even wilder fairy tales. But then we must remember the burden that is laid on the primitive mind of being impelled to find an explanation for everything, and of never being able to find a true one; "for the ancients," as Horace Walpole puts it, "who were wiser than we, never gave a reason, that could be a reason, for anything."

Up to a very advanced stage of civilization, the wisdom of mankind, such as it was, resided far below the conscious surface. Man answers the calls of his environment as the swallows fly south in Autumn, or as the flowers advertise their attractions to the insects; as woman is said to give her heart and know not why. But it is only man who feels the necessity of explaining himself to himself, and only within recent years has he begun to provide himself with the means of explanation, by exploring that hidden self that is so much the most considerable part of his personality.

It is hence that so often when he has acted out of a profound intuition, he will libel himself by some childish explanation of his reasons. This particular cult of the born man, the primal gentleman, may turn out to have something behind it of more abiding value than stories of gods impregnating maidens, or of the child coming forth charged, like a battery, with power of controlling the weather or fertilizing crops. What is the sense of it? At what mark is the inner man, or man of men, that decides for whole communities, taking his subconscious aim?

What indeed but that of all life, from its first micro-

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scopic stirrings in primeval jelly? For life, in proportion to its vitality, is a ceaseless urge to surpass itself. That is its nobility, that its divine element; for no more blasphemous lie was ever misbegotten than that which would degrade it to a mere struggle of the creature to adapt itself to environment. The humblest and feeblest cell is enough of God's gentleman to strive for that which is divine and eternal, in preference to what is selfish and individual. Life is not a fire at which to warm one's own hands, but a torch to pass on, even in dying. If it had been less than the Spirit of God that moved upon the face of the waters, dead matter, even if it had come alive, would never have got beyond a meal. The urge to reproduce surpasses that to feed, in proportion as love surpasses gluttony.

And when man has risen to exercise what is as yet too inarticulate to be called discourse of reason, we find him still handing on the same torch, still inspired by the same spirit that has evolved him out of his ancestral mud. It is only as a secondary activity that he is engaged in feathering his individual nest. The path by which the unquenched fire has been borne up to manhood, climbs onward and above into the clouds, where, as the climber believes, is the abode of the immortals. His motto bequeathed by countless ancestral species remains *Excelsior!*

In this light, it is not difficult to see what was the real idea behind the cult of the "born man." In his perpetual endeavour to surpass himself, man learnt to fix his highest hope on picked minorities of his species. It is as if, somewhere in the depths of his being, he had realized the truth that evolutionary progress depends not on the average, but on the exception. As was dis-

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covered during the concluding phase of the last war, the most hopeful way of advance is not on an even front, but by the deepest possible penetration of isolated parties into the enemy's position, and the devotion of all efforts to consolidate and enlarge their gains.

"Establish the variation," Life might have said, "and the average may take care of itself."

Thus the common sense of *homo sapiens* felt it to be enough if some godlike quality could be engendered in only a few favoured specimens of his kind, provided only that this could be in some way established and perpetuated. And what better way could occur to the primitive mind than this one of birth?

After all, it is our own way of dealing with the rest of the living creation. Whether it is a prize tulip we want, or a milch cow, or a Derby winner, we set to work to specialize our required type by breeding. Is it to be wondered at that man should apply to himself the arts by whose aid he has learnt to exploit his lordship of creation? Still half brute, and yet consumed with the desire to become all god, is not his most obvious way to breed from divine stock? Nor is such stock likely to be lacking on demand. Voltaire had merely stumbled upon one of the most ancient of all secrets, when he said that if there were not a God it would be necessary to invent one. The primitive mind was capable of inventing, and certifying, anything required to fit into its psychological pattern. There is no more obvious stimulant of godlike conduct than the glow of the divine blood in one's own veins; nor, to extend the principle, can one make a better start at inducing a man to behave like a gentleman, than to persuade him that he is already a gentleman born.

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I use the word "start" advisedly. For there is a law of diminishing potency that governs all suggestions of this kind. Sooner or later the "born man" will come to take his status as a matter of course, and it will have the effect not of a stimulus, but a narcotic. Why should he do, or be, anything to justify what comes to him by nature, whatever he does or is? Why should I exert myself to be a gentleman, if I am one already, and evermore shall be so? The utmost that can be demanded of me is that I should hold on tight to the privileges of my rank, and act towards all outsiders in the spirit of a certain undergraduate of my time, who earned himself a vivid but unenviable notoriety, by describing a fellow member of his college as "utterly unborn."

Not towards this end were our ancestors striving with their myths and over-beliefs on the importance of birth. It is something more than pedigree that any practical person has in view, even in the breeding of animals. Take that most aristocratically principled of all events, a prize dog show. No doubt it is essential for each dog to have a verifiable pedigree; but if the pedigree were all that mattered, there would be no point in holding the show at all. It is the dog's points, the presumed effect of his pedigree, for which the prize is awarded, and the dog whose nose is too short or whose tail too curly, may trace his descent to Gellert or Cerberus himself, without affecting the issue. Still more conspicuously in a race-horse is birth a means to an end, and not an end in itself; for use, and not for privilege. The basest born three-year-old is free to win the Derby, provided he can run fast enough to the post.

A primitive community, that knocks even its kings

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on the head when they get past work, does not confer its privileges for nothing. If it honours the man of birth or family, it is because, rightly or wrongly, it imagines that it is going to get its honour's worth back. It wants to produce a superior type of man, for certain definite purposes, and it believes that the best way to accomplish this, with men as with animals, is by breeding.

Here we have a word that is going to carry us a stage further in our quest for the ideal gentleman, than one that merely signifies birth. It comes more naturally to us, today, to estimate gentleness in terms of breeding. For a man's birth is something over and done with, and—except by such arts as enable the profiteer to discover a legitimate ancestor among the followers of William the Bastard—something that cannot conceivably be improved upon; but breeding without works is dead. The man of gentle birth can never be base-born, but he may be villainously ill-bred. That was certainly the opinion held by that incontestably well-bred Prince of Wales, who afterwards became Edward VII, about his nephew, the Kaiser, and was the foundation of a dislike that may well have contributed towards the supreme catastrophe of the World War. That, too, was evidently the opinion of the Duke of Wellington—no mean judge—of King Edward's great uncle, George IV, whose flourish and display contrasted so unfavourably with the dignity and good breeding of the Duke of Anjou, afterwards Charles X of France, that "the first gentleman in Europe" might have been taken for "Monsieur's" valet.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Swinton's *Life of Georgiana, Lady de Ros*, in A. Smythe Palmer's *Mirror of a Gentleman*.

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Wellington was no doubt restricting the word "breeding" to a specialized, and perhaps a shallow interpretation. The House of Bourbon cannot be said to have been happily inspired in the production of such types as that of its last reigning monarch. But the principle is clear, and it is fundamental. Birth, in any healthy society, is only important as the means of breeding the right sort of man. The gentleman is only well born because that is supposed to be the most effective means of getting him well bred. Breed your godlike stock from the seed of gods; lay in gentle birth the foundation of gentle manners. No doubt when the spirit grows faint and hardens into law, the community forgets, even in the depth of its soul, the informing purpose of its institutions. Then it is that birth comes to be valued for its own sake, and "gentleman" degenerates into a title not of honour but of pedigree.

But then why not cut out birth altogether, and recognize frankly that a man's breeding depends—to use the most up-to-date phraseology—entirely upon the way in which his reactions are conditioned? If it is manners and not birth that makes the gentleman, then, since everyone is free to make his own manners, birth becomes an enormous irrelevance, and our ancestors who set such store by it are seen to be the victims of sheer and snobbish delusion.

But neither they, nor the problem itself, were as simple as all that. It is hard to indict our whole race of fallacy. Beneath its most fantastic over-beliefs there is usually some core of sound sense, if we could only penetrate to it. And the ancients, who made birth the foundation of breeding, had at least a shrewder sense

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of reality than those moderns, who argue as if it were quite a simple thing to take any piece of raw human material, and lick it into shape, as the she-bear was supposed to lick her cubs.

For we miss the whole point of breeding, when we talk as if it were in any man's power to become well-bred, simply by taking enough thought and pains. "If at first you don't succeed in being a gentleman—try, try, try again, and you certainly will!"

The fallacy is that the complete gentleman *is*, without trying, and until he stops trying, he never will be. The mythical Winchester boy, who got the lady a chair in which the boy from a certain other school promptly sat down, would hardly have justified the Wykehamist tradition if he had had to conquer a severe temptation to sit down in it himself. It would presumably never have occurred to him as possible; it would hardly be too much to say that he could not have done it if he had tried. It would have been like undressing in the drawing room; a thing that not only is not, but could not be, done—even for a bet.

Breeding in fact, is nothing until it has become a second nature; which is to say, until it has ceased to demand conscious effort. That man had the root of the matter who put up on his notice board:

### DEPOSITING LITTER

GENTLEMEN WILL NOT, OTHERS MUST NOT.

He would have done better still if he had made it, "Others *are* not."

Breeding, whatever else it is, is not the sort of thing you can reasonably hope to acquire in one of those courses of half a dozen lessons that are guaranteed



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by grateful actresses and presumably unbiassed professors, to renew anyone's mind and quadruple his income in three months. Even the horse does not become thoroughbred in less than several generations; how much less a man, whose breeding represents an incomparably more complex achievement than that of many racehorses!

So at anyrate it would seem to have been regarded by the inarticulate common sense that was the real wisdom of our ancestors. Rightly or wrongly, they pursued the ideal of breeding in the most literal sense. They cultivated the "born man" in order to obtain the "bred man." How far they were right in doing so, and how far we should be right in imitating them, are questions that may not admit of the simple and dogmatic answers they only too often receive.

Least of all can we take at their face value the explanations that contemporaries have vouchsafed for their own proceedings. There appears to be a pride or modesty that prevents human beings, below a certain degree of sophistication, from ever openly admitting that their customs or cults are social investments, and that in the last resort their worth is precisely what they will fetch. Perish a thought so ignoble! All privileged persons, from kings down to mere "born men" or persons of gentle blood, claim and are accorded something in the nature of divine right:

The rich man in his castle,  
The poor man at his gate,  
God made them high or lowly,  
And ordered their estate.

There is a deep wisdom behind this reticence. If the community is to get full value out of its institutions,

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they must be backed by loyalty, and unreflecting self-sacrifice. No man is going to lay down his life for a social convenience. The Thanes who, when their lord had fallen, scorned to survive him, were no utilitarians; the loyalty of a Highlander to his chief demanded no return, still less that of the Haytian negro, who jumped off the palace wall at the bidding of his King, and then, having survived by a miracle, presented himself to obey the order to jump again. Even the traditional loyalty of villagers to the squire and his family, is seldom consciously based on a simple calculation of favours to be received.

But this conscious unreason by which men persuade themselves that they act, has its limits. Sooner or later privileges, however divinely sanctioned, that fail to justify themselves by results, are scrapped; sooner or later the hive will dispose of its drones no matter by what eternal loyalty it has sworn to preserve them. The divine king, the human god, who turns out in practice to be below the kingly standard, is soon enough disposed of, whether by poison, assassination, revolt, or in the ordinary routine of tribal custom; and it is the same with classes as with individuals. The habit of loyalty, unbroken for centuries, is snapped in a night; the community reckons up the cost of its thoroughbreds, and decides that they are no longer worth their keep. And then they go the way of the French noblesse in the Revolution, or of the Russian upper class after the fall of Tsardom.

We have come, then, to visualize gentlefolk, no longer through the eyes of Dr. Johnson, as the best *born*, but as the best *bred* members of the community. They may be regarded as the picked pioneers of evolution; the

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carefully selected prize flowers in the human garden. They are the living hope of mankind, in that they show the level to which life may be raised. That at least is the intention of their breeding, and it is according to their success in its fulfilment that their existence alone can be justified.

*MEN OF GOOD BREEDING*

BUT the mere notion of breeding is still too wide and indefinite. To speak of the gentleman as a man of breeding is to invite the question "But what sort of breeding?" For men are, and have been, bred for all sorts of purposes, that on the most liberal interpretation could not be described as gentlemanly.

Take, as an extreme instance, that simple and unpleasant community in the Madras Province, called the Khonds, who, until stopped by an intolerant Raj, were in the habit of putting heart into their soil by periodical sacrifices of human victims regularly bred for the purpose, being married to each other and treated with the greatest respect, until the time came for one or other of them to be put to death, at the end of a pious orgy, on the principle of the greater the agony, the better the harvest.

Or take the depressed classes in India, the Sudras or untouchables, who, according to the ancient laws, were born from the feet of Brahma as the Brahmans were from his head; whose destiny was, in consequence, one of perpetual servitude, and whose inferiority was rubbed in by every means that could possibly be devised. And yet these were quite as much men of breeding—of a sort—as the Brahmans themselves.

Men, in fact, can be bred for anything, from gods to slaves; so that though every gentleman is a man of breeding, it by no means follows that every man of breeding is a gentleman. Breeding is more than birth;

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but it is still far less than enough, and until we have narrowed it down to good, or gentle, we have the back of our task still unbroken.

By what signs, then, are we to distinguish from all other types this of which we are in quest? What is our test for gentleness of breeding; and where are we to make a start?

Let us come back to the word "gentleman" and concern ourselves this time not with how it originated, but with what it has come to imply. When we talk of such and such a man as having been a great or true gentleman, what common basis of agreement is there in all our minds? No doubt about the finer points of breeding there are as many shades of opinion as there are judges; but words do not develop and enrich themselves in the course of centuries, without some agreed sense of their underlying significance.

The very notion of the gentleman as a man of breeding will afford us a clue. For the striving after the ideal type does not conclude in this or that individual, but is continuous from one generation to another. It is not enough merely to receive the torch; it must also be handed on. To be well bred oneself is only half the battle.

The foxhunting squires of Regency times had their own way of putting it. There is a sporting print which shows the famous Squire Mytton arriving, in characteristic fashion, at a meet, by jumping a park paling, apparently on the top of a hound. On which the recorded comment of Sir Graham Bellingham, another sporting magnate was,

"Well done, Neck or Nothing! You're not a bad 'un to breed from."

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It is but a step from the ridiculous of this eulogy, to the sublime of

"In thy seed shall all the generations of the earth be blessed."

The spirit informing both is that of life itself, through unthinkable stretches of time before ever the human level was reached. We live not for ourselves alone, but for the future; it is not enough to be good, unless we are also good to breed from.

That at any rate is implicit in the notion of the gentleman, as, before all other things, the man of breeding. He is the nearest approach to the godlike that his fellow men can conceive; the one of all others in whom the glory and exuberance of life is most visibly manifest. Whatever else may be required of him for the attainment of perfect breeding, the first and fundamental requirement is that he should be good to breed from.

For whatever may or may not be his qualifications of birth, he is nature's aristocrat, in a succession unthinkable more venerable than that claimed for the proudest prince or potentate. There must have been prize specimens, males of breeding, long before there were men. The master bull of the herd, the lion who at mating season came victorious over all rivals, the bird with the most gorgeous plumage or the stag with the finest antlers; such were nature's gentles before there could be any question of a human termination.

Now we can see more plainly into the gulf that is fixed between the rival conceptions of the man of breeding and the saint. For—at any rate in that Western civilization with which we are most concerned—a man's holiness culminates and ends in his

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own individual personality. So far from the Christian holy man being regarded as a good 'un to breed from, he has most often been prevented, by the sternest of taboos, from ostensibly breeding at all. The aim of the Catholic Church has been to train up a physically sterile army of the Church Militant, regular and secular; and in the days of its greatest power this had the effect of withdrawing the intellectual pick of the community from the chance of transmitting any favourable variations to posterity, except in so far as this could be effected in mortal sin and *sub rosa*.

It was not from its Founder, but from the great neighbour cults of the East, that Christianity had become infected with the notion of material life being something evil in itself, and therefore to be starved and denied in every possible way. The very idea of breeding began to stink in pious nostrils; the reproductive instinct fell under a ban; life turned back upon itself, and sought to convert the whole of its riches into annuities terminable at death. Chastity came to be no longer a selective discipline, but a sheer denial of breeding—it seemed a blasphemous indecency to think of the Divine Founder as having part or lot, even by birth, in the process of human reproduction. And the logical climax of this way of thinking is attained when the most powerful intellect among the Early Fathers, St. Origen, converts himself into a eunuch for the Lord's sake.

It is true that attempts have been made to reconcile, and even combine, the two ideals. The Hindu genius, so much more daring and subtle in its psychology than that of the West, did indeed conceive the idea of breeding a caste of Twice-born, or sacrosanct, Brah-

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mans. But the very limitations of this experiment are significant. It was only when the Brahman had begotten and reared up his family, that he was allowed to retire into the wilds and cultivate a life of holiness. Nor was there any question of the father's merit, apart from his status, being transmitted to the child. That invisible capital had been accumulated by the little Twice-born in previous lives, that could obviously not include the father's. Moreover the chivalrous and—as we should now put it—gentlemanly virtues, were reserved for the cultivation not of the holy Brahman, but of the secondary order of Ksattriyas, which comprehended the nobility, the gentry, and even the royalty, of Hindustan.

All the same, some of the early Hindu legends do at least envisage the possibility of breeding holiness. We hear of sages of renowned spiritual potency attending royal courts in order to provide exceptional sons for royal ladies. But the distinction between saintliness and good breeding is only emphasized by the grotesque impracticability of such dream bridges.

There is a sense indeed in which we may say that it is easier to qualify as saint than gentleman. For once we have agreed to look no further than the present generation, we have a much wider range of candidates from which to select. We are no longer restricted in our choice to those vital and exuberant specimens of humanity from which we should wish to breed. It is notorious that spiritual genius is rather less likely than not to be housed in what, from a eugenist's or doctor's standpoint, would rank as the thoroughbred of their kind:

“He hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shal



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see him there is no beauty that we shall desire in him. He is despised and rejected of men. . . .”

No modern rationalist could have made a more realistic forecast of the expected deliverer, the man of supreme holiness.

What we have said about one—the religious—form of genius, applies, more or less, to all. Towards the end of last century it was quite in the quasi-scientific fashion, to write of genius as if it were a form of degeneracy, and as if great wits were not only allied to madness, but actually possessed by it. Certainly, when the life histories of acknowledged geniuses come to be examined in detail, there does appear to be something strangely wrong—apart from genius itself—with most of them.

The psychological revolution of our century has thrown a new light on this apparent paradox. For we know now that the development of abnormal powers may be the way of compensation that repressed and thwarted spirits have discovered from a torturing sub-consciousness of inferiority. The despised outcasts of boyhood, the Napoleons and Shelleys; neurotics like Nietzsche, invalids like Dr. Johnson, deformities like Byron, epileptics like Caesar, persons who for one reason or another have failed to adapt themselves to their environment, all, like Shakespeare,

Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,  
With what I most enjoy contented least.

The answer to which trips off the tongue, to the effect that if genius be born of any sort or sense of inferiority, so much the better for inferiority, and its appertaining complex. But this is to miss half the point,

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by assuming that the exceptional individual is the thing supremely worth cultivating.

It is on a very different principle that we cultivate men of breeding, men—that is to say—not only well-bred but good to breed from. This requirement genius by no means obviously contrives to satisfy. Without going into very complicated statistics, one may say that while a not abnormal talent would appear to be an eugenic asset, the inspired abnormality that we characterize as genius is decidedly the reverse.

A writer, J. F. Nisbet, who, as long ago as 1891, compiled what might be described as a case-book of super-normal pathology, was convinced, on the evidence, that “the families of great men die out in the course of a few generations; occasionally they recover themselves through a mixture of healthy and undistinguished blood, but in that event the period at which the man of genius makes his advent will be found to coincide with the lowest ebb of family vitality. Had the human race consisted three hundred years ago of Shakespeares, Miltons and Cromwells, it would long since have disappeared from the face of the earth.”<sup>1</sup>

So that, even if we do not choose to go the whole way with Mr. Nisbet, we can hardly characterize the stock of genius as a “good ’un to breed from.” To put it biologically; however much it may pay to breed from favourable variations, beyond a certain degree of abnormorality the healthiness of the variation for breeding purposes is destroyed. It would seem to be the nature of genius to squander not only its vital income, but also its capital, in an orgy of creative achievement. Genius begets masterpieces, as Athene

<sup>1</sup> *The Insanity of Genius*, pp. 316–17.

## MEN OF GOOD BREEDING

sprang full-armed from the head of Zeus; but the children of its loins have to suffer for them.

When, therefore, we talk of the gentleman as a man of good breeding, it is not the breeding of holiness or even genius that we have in mind. The saint and the genius may indeed be, but, as such, are not in the least degree more likely to be, gentlemen. Nor indeed has any such claim been seriously advanced on their behalf, except by those to whom no conceivable achievements are worth while, save as steps on the ascent to gentility.

But there is a pride of genius, and even of sanctity, that is too superbly self-assured to covet any honour but its own. "If I must glory," says St. Paul, "let it be . . ." not, at any rate, in the pride of Roman citizenship or purity of Pharasaic descent; not in any promise to the seed of his body. Such only begetters of immortal progeny are too busy with its creation to think in terms of rank or breeding, except when even genius—and that seldom of the supreme order—has subtracted from itself by condescending to standards not its own. And even so, the sycophant of genius, the dedication flunkey, is more likely than not to be compromising with ignoble necessity, in the spirit of Phoebus accepting the yoke for an ulterior or divine end.

Genius has its own ends and they are irrelevant to those of breeding. It is to this that we have to look for the explanation of a strange and significant lack of appreciation accorded to it in the feminine scale of values. No doubt exceptions might be cited, but a survey of the world's supremely brilliant men leaves us with the impression that they have been less than averagely successful in the lists of love: Napoleon, for

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example, who subdued half Europe without making a conquest of either of the women he married; Shakespeare, even, who, from the little we know of him, does not appear to have been conspicuously successful either as husband or lover.

And woman, the trustee for posterity, is, from her own standpoint, excellently advised by the warning voice that bids her beware, in her inmost being, of the embraces of genius. Its ends are not her ends. It will, if it can, seize upon the vital fund of energy that she holds in trust for the future, to squander it all upon a present immortality. It will use and destroy her *en passant*, as Hamlet Ophelia, or Shelley Harriet. It will vivisect her soul, for the sake of experience, as would seem to have been Goethe's way with a succession of female exhibits. And if she can, she will clip the wings of Pegasus and dope him tame for the shafts of the family governess cart.

Happy indeed are those supremely inspired lovers who can contrive to eliminate, for all practical purposes, a partner of flesh and blood: Dante resurrecting a dead Beatrice in the likeness of his own ideal; Petrarch giving immortal form to his dream of a conveniently unattainable Laura, who, like the sensible matron she was, would appear to have received his sonnets in a spirit of properly detached appreciation.

It is idle to rail at woman for knowing her own business, and acting on her profoundest intuitions. It is no part of her womanly function to be a begetter of masterpieces, or to appraise men according to their works in this generation. In her scale of values the father counts for more than the maker, and the idea of breeding takes on a dominating significance. The

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man of best breeding is the king of all, the supremely desirable mate.

But this very man is he whom we have already identified with our ideal gentleman. And this throws a new and revealing light upon the nature of the good breeding which is his distinguishing quality. For unlike genius, and more even than holiness, it is that which earns for its possessor the prize of sexual selection. It would hardly be too much to say that every woman, in proportion to her womanliness, loves a man for his breeding. The gentleman is pre-eminently the lady's man.

Hence we may reasonably expect to find him nearest the ideal, and graced with the most consummate breeding, in those communities where woman, as woman, is held most in honour, and where feminine influence is accorded the greatest scope.

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WE have dwelt on the fundamental distinction between the saint and the man of breeding, but perhaps it would have been nearer to the mark to say that breeding has its own saints, those godlike individuals who have kept the faith and walked in all the ways of a gentleman, and even, by their example, set a higher standard for those who have come after them. These torchbearers for posterity need not necessarily have been clothed in material flesh and blood; there may never have been any such person as Sir Lancelot du Lake, and yet gentleness has waxed more gentle for his sake since his birth in the dreamland of chivalrous romance.

Where are we to look for the first principles of this unformulated faith? and by what test shall we identify it? Or—to put it more modestly—by what preliminary test shall we distinguish its manifestations from those of other faiths and philosophies? For it is hardly to be expected that anything so complex as breeding will yield its secret in any simple formula.

This at least we are in a position to assert. To the pattern of perfect breeding, of which we are in quest—breeding in the double sense of “well bred” and “good to breed from”—one attribute is fundamental, that of strength.

We are using this word, not in the crude physical sense, but in the broadest and profoundest that it is capable of bearing. It is from strength, and for strength,

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that we breed; it is strength that every normal woman looks to find in the man that she loves; it is strength that is implied in our very usage of the word "man." Whatever gentleness may be, this at least is certain, that to be gentlemanly a man must first of all be manly.

We might make the notion more explicit by borrowing one of the unloveliest products of modern slang, and saying that a gentleman is nothing if not a he-man; which is at least more expressive than to describe our ideal of breeding as fundamentally masculine. What on earth, as Browning might have put it, had any gentleman to do with the mawkish and unmanly, what with the effeminate and decadent? The virtue he embodies is that which preserves its Roman sense of virility, the beauty of manliness.

Now one could never talk in this way, except by a preposterous straining of language, about either the saint or the genius. The records of pious devotion abound in a positive luxuriance of weakness. The Hebrew psalmist is never tired of proclaiming how he is poor and in misery, a worm and no man; how the fear of death has fallen upon him, and he longs for the wings of a dove to fly away from his enemies. This is no doubt poignantly beautiful, and, of its kind, unsurpassed poetry; but it is hardly what we should describe as the language of a man of honour. Nor do grown up men to-day, when they enter a place of worship, turn a hair at appropriating to themselves the sentiments of Cowper, one of the most effeminate beings that ever donned breeches, and addressing the Founder of their religion not only as their shepherd, but also as their husband.

This is not to say that all worship is effeminate and

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all saints sheep in men's clothing, but merely that from piety, unlike breeding, there is no question of effeminacy being barred.

Of genius it is almost superfluous to speak—the facts are notorious. Cowper himself, not to speak of the psalmists from whom I have quoted, were its undoubted possessors. And of genius in general one may say that its ranks abound in examples of the male body housing an hermaphrodite soul. And genius, emphatically, is justified by her works of all her children, the Oscar Wildes and Sodomas no less than the Tennysons and Wordsworths. But it neither is, nor need condescend to be, justified by the canons of breeding.

Our quest for the gentleman has brought us to a standpoint with which the modern mind is only too familiar. For it would seem as if we had discovered him at last in that type of person whose be-all and end-all in life is an uncompromising virility, the human beast of prey, roving lustfully in search of spoils and victory, knowing no law but his own will. We have a name by which he is known and worshipped, a name most appropriately born in Germany, and domiciled in English as Superman.

Can it be this old idol of our undergraduate days that we have come out to resurrect, and invest with the name of gentleman? For it really might seem as if that were our logical terminus. Man of birth—man of breeding—man of virile breeding: could we more explicitly have defined the three stages of the superman's genesis?

Search his scriptures, and you shall find that this was the very idea simmering in the fevered brain of his discoverer and prophet, Friederich Nietzsche, who



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—not perhaps so startlingly to a Freud-conscious generation—was himself the very reverse of the demi-god he proclaimed, being an invalid so hypersensitive to pain as to be incapable of conducting a *viva voce* examination, for fear of hurting a candidate's feelings by ploughing him.

Breeding was the very spirit and justification of the cult he proclaimed:

“My brethren, not backwards shall your lordliness gaze, but outwards! Exiles shall ye be from all father and ancestor lands.

“Your children's land shall ye love: be that love your new nobility—the undiscovered, in furthest ocean!”

Never has the gospel of breeding been proclaimed with so lyric an eloquence. Such eloquence that we abandon ourselves to its spell, without ever troubling to think out its prosaic implications.

A new cult is seldom more than an old theme in a new setting, and there is nothing new about the superman except his name, in this last of his innumerable incarnations. He has often figured as god, still more often as hero. It would not be too much to say that every little boy is born into all the innocence of supermanly egotism, and with no other instinct than towards the uncontrolled fulfilment of every desire. The pure superman would be the fortunately unthinkable being who should, from the cradle to the grave, contrive to avoid the inhibition of any desire whatever, even to the extent of Kenneth Grahame's high-spirited Sam, who, having broken his baby sister's neck, was deprived of jam for tea.

The remarkable thing is, not that there should have

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been an agelong supply of candidates for supermanly honours, but that these honours should have been freely accorded by the rest of their kind to those who have succeeded in making their might their right, and their will their law. One can easily explain whatever love has clung to the persons and memories of those whose life has been one long sacrifice to their fellows, to such as Father Damien, the friend of the lepers, and St. Francis, the husband of Poverty. But how shall we account for the far more fervent and spontaneous worship of heroes with whom it has been Number One first, last, and all the time, and whose only form of sacrifice has been that of their fellows, in hecatombs—multiplied by anything up to ten-thousandfold—to their noble selves?

Take that earliest and most glorious of hero sagas the *Iliad*. Mark how the poet—or ought one to say the syndicate of Homeric dons?—introduces the theme:

“Sing, goddess, the devastating wrath of Achilles, Peleus born, that wrought woe to innumerable Achaeans, and sent forth to Hades many mighty souls of heroes, and gave their carcasses to dogs and to all birds, that so the counsel of Zeus might be fulfilled.”

Let us express the same idea a little more prosaically:

“This story tells how, by God’s will, the ungovernable temper of a petty chieftain involved his fellow countrymen in untold calamities and slaughter.”

Achilles, in fact, is of the true supermanly breed, an exuberant egotist, storming through life, like a grown-up spoilt child, wrecking everything round him in his perpetual tantrums. Even Homer will hardly prevent his readers from feeling in their hearts that the great,

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final duel with Hector, was one in which the savage got the better of the gentleman—most piteously.

Such glorification of wrath—how else can we account for it, save that it is somehow bound up with a cult of breeding? It is even cited as a special attribute of the Deity. One would have thought an almighty Being would at least, in the course of eternity, have learnt how to rule His own spirit; and that a sense of His divine dignity, failing one of divine humour, would have kept Him from setting so flagrant an example of mortal sin to His creatures and children. But one expects a father by proxy to have a full and overflowing store of virility, and from an All-Father the demand is greatest of all. What normal child likes its father the less for a certain fatherly explosiveness? After all, fathers will be fathers, as much as boys boys. And what should a father be but as virile as possible?

A good 'un to breed from! It is in this sense that we instinctively take the idea of manliness, and that we build upon it that of supermanliness. The nobility of the creature consists in its urge to surpass itself, to sacrifice the present to the future and the one life to all life. That is why we find humanity, in all its stages, so pathetically prone to idolize even its scourges, if it can only convince itself that these are in a special sense the vehicles of the same creative energy that causes the corn to grow and the hinds to bring forth their young.

The question that concerns us here is to what extent we are to identify the spirit of this cult with the faith of a gentleman. Are we to conceive of our man of good breeding simply as of the human unit supercharged with virility?

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Certainly, if the common fame of the ages is anything to go by, we cannot conceive of him as failing to qualify by this test—whether we are to regard it as preliminary or final. The gentleman is the man of honour, who knows how to defend it. Like an angry God, it is dangerous to provoke him. In our Western civilization, at any rate, his status has been defined by the right to bear arms. The privilege to which he has clung most pertinaciously has been that of mutual homicide, among his own class, on the duelling ground. His very amusements have been devised so as to provide him with perpetual channels for the overflow of energy. Hunting the beast is, by immemorial tradition, the royal and gentlemanly sport. The word of supreme disgrace for him has ever been “coward.”

On the other hand, his code has seldom been lacking in tolerance to sins of virility. To sin like a man need not preclude the carrying of it off like a gentleman. “Even vice,” wrote Burke, about the morals of chivalry, “lost half its evil by losing all its grossness.”

However regrettable the fact may be, it can hardly be denied that the majority of the commandments in the Decalogue have been judged breakable within recognized bounds of honour. Thus a gentleman might kill his man in fair quarrel; he might enjoy his mistress in fair love; might indulge in certain forms of open robbery, though not in the furtive and underhand modes of appropriation that are generally classed as stealing. But come to the next commandment, that against bearing false witness, and he stood to be not only damned but disgraced by its breach. For the circumstances are almost inconceivable in which a man may lie out of the exuberance of his manhood.

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Falsehood is the last, and not infrequently the first, resort of weakness. Accordingly, to accuse a gentleman of lying was an insult that in the high duelling days of the French noblesse, could be expiated by nothing short of death.

Thus we find that good breeding is fundamentally virile; manliness is the first and indispensable requisite of a gentleman. But here again we are brought up against that persistent question of ours—is it enough? Have we discovered our ideal gentleman, almost and altogether, in this paragon of masculinity, this trampler on all laws, this superman, supercharged with what Mr. Bernard Shaw has called Life Force?

On that question the latest psychology has thrown an expected, and revealing light. The very strength of these hectoring egomaniacs, these ruthless and dominating supermen, is now seen to be rooted in weakness; their will to power the symptom of an arrested mentality, the explosive violence of their reactions the result of a diseased nervous system. Biographies of heroes have to be brought up to date as case histories of neurotics.

There comes back to mind a saying of Chesterton's about the very strong lines taken by very weak men. The more one delves either into one's private experience or that of mankind at large, the more one is convinced of its profundity. It is worth noticing that the word "fearful," which now means terrifying, was formerly used in precisely the opposite sense. An Elizabethan would have talked of a sheep or a poltroon as fearful. And even now, when we apply the word in the new sense of some stern militarist or fire-eating bully, we can nearly always feel the old somehow latent. The

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fear that possesses him is greater than that which he inspires; the more he feels of it, the more desperately will he seek to inspire it.

There is no more revealing example of the weak man turned violent, than that presented by the most tragic monarch, perhaps, in all history, the last of the Russian Tsars. Nicholas II was to all appearance not only one of the feeblest, but one of the mildest of men—the kind of person who is reputed to be incapable of saying “bo” to a goose, and who certainly proved incapable of saying “no” to a hysterical consort. And yet this abnormally feeble creature turns out, in his dealings with his own people, to have been obsessed by a fanatical belief in ruthless measures and the iron hand. We find him on one occasion rushing with distorted face, at an officer who had just succeeded in quieting a dangerous mob without bloodshed:

“You must shoot, general, you must shoot! You must use bayonets and bullets against the rabble! You must tear them to pieces!”<sup>1</sup>

It is like the terrified snapping and snarling of some timid animal caught in a trap.

As anybody knows, who has had much to do with dogs, the savage or dangerous animal is nearly always one who is either congenitally timid and nervous, or has been made so by teasing. He rushes at you yapping and snapping, as if to say:

“Don’t you dare touch me!”

You stretch out your hand to pat him, and, foreboding assault, he tries to anticipate you by getting his bite in first. His own fearfulness, in the old sense, has the effect of making him so fearful (in the new) to

<sup>1</sup> *Nicholas II.* by Mohammed Essad Bey, p. 133.

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his human environment, as perhaps to lead to a demand for his destruction.

Human beings are only different in the vastly increased power for mischief with which their reactions have been armed by science, and in the fact that their more highly developed nervous systems render these reactions capable of greater extravagance than those of the timidest dog. There is a type of patient, in asylums, who so habitually suspects the whole world of being in league against his innocent self, that he will, in his despair, commit murder, if he gets the chance. Unfortunately only a small proportion of those afflicted with this delusion get put out of harm's way—others are let loose on the world with a vengeance.

The new technique of mental healing, called psychoanalysis, has added to thought a notion of incomparably greater value than that of its much advertised Oedipus complex. Stripped of its technical jargon, it amounts to this. Each one of us, from the moment he is born, is faced with a lifelong problem of getting what he wants out of the world around him. It starts with the simplest need of all, that of nourishment, on which the whole considerable energy of life's latest recruit is concentrated. Let him be kept waiting for ever so short a time, and the curse of Adam is upon him. His energy, baulked of its desired outlet, vents itself in a lusty roar, that very probably does the business.

So it starts, the lifelong struggle of the human will to wring satisfaction out of an unsympathetic environment, and blessed is he who goes on developing his powers, and reconciling himself to their limitations, without undue nervous strain. But what only too often happens is that the will finds itself so continually

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frustrated of this satisfaction, that it loses faith in itself; it exhausts its vital energy in fruitless efforts like those of a caged bird dashing against its bars, until at last it acquires the habit of violent, aggressive reaction, from sheer experience of its own futility. And the time may come when luck or an acquired cunning will render these strivings effective—perhaps on a vast scale. But the habit of violence and aggression, the despairing roar of the child whose mother has gone out of earshot, the suppressed longing of the school butt to torture and trample on his tormentors—these persist; these, armed with power, become the iron will of the superman. And when whole nations have been sufficiently frustrated to get into this collective habit of mind, they develop all the characteristics of highly strung dogs turned savage, Cerberuses with anything up to 150 million heads.

It is the most natural thing in the world that these blood and iron strong men should almost invariably turn out to have been abnormally weak or humiliated—and to be getting their own back for it. We know how Nietzsche, the great strong man on paper of modern times, was a pathetic invalid, so long as he was able to keep out of the asylum.

And indeed the one thing that we can characterize as normal about these exponents of the will to power, is that the strength of this will turns out to be proportionate to the humiliation of some physical defect, or social stigma. The world-shaking thunder of the club-footed Byron; the supercharged virility of the more than probably impotent Carlyle; the shrieking violence and sexual frightfulness of poor little Swinburne, who was scared dead drunk when a real



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enchantress summoned him to the roses and raptures of her arms; the unbridled bullishness—if the stock exchange will grant us the loan of a word—with which the tuberculous neurotic, D. H. Lawrence, energized his wish dreams.

“Woe unto them that resist my will!” This expression and many like it, burst from the lips or pen of one who, in his day, succeeded in impressing himself—and what a self! with his withered arm and world-shaking nerve tremors—on the imagination of mankind, as the latest, and perhaps the greatest of imperial war lords. There are others, with reputations still unpricked, who loom even more terribly in the world’s eye. . . . We have travelled far beyond mere neurosis; the superman’s crime sheet, his score to date of cold-blooded murders, is published for him who runs—usually away from him—to read; even, beyond the reach of his arm, the superman’s certificate in lunacy. . . .

Superman! Let them keep the name and welcome: but gentleman? It sticks in the throat.

That worldly wise cynic, Edward VII, was one of the few people to whom it never occurred to be impressed by the terror of his nephew’s poses. He would remark that William was no gentleman, and leave it at that. If he had survived till today, he might or might not have spoken of Tyrant This or Dictator That, in a form calculated to suggest that the term gentleman could conceivably be associated with him even by negation.

But let us turn from these somewhat equivocal cases, to that of the acknowledged chief of historical supermen, Napoleon Buonaparte. Can we doubt that it was at the cadet school at Brienne that the seeds of

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his unbridled lust for power were sown? The sensitive, reserved boy, with his foreign accent and uncouth appearance, his poverty and inferior status to that of his aristocratic fellow cadets, became a friendless pariah, the butt, as he himself put it, of louts, who, proud of the dainties they enjoyed themselves, insulted with their sneers the privations he had to endure. Hence his refuge in a hedgehog-like reserve, broken by explosive rages. One of the few messmates to whom he ever broke his mind, testifies how he again and again vowed his determination of doing the French all the harm he could.

Were conditions ever more ideally set for the incubation of an inferiority complex? It was the same persecuted cadet who, as overlord of half Europe, could flash out with, "What does a man like me care about the loss of a million?"; who, in the ignoble sunset of his career could react to the petty indignities put upon him by an over-anxious custodian, like an old dog growling and snapping because his temper has been spoilt in puppyhood.

But a gentleman! Or as greatly the reverse as he was a master of the art of war? On this point it may be worth citing the opinion of the Duke of Wellington:

"Buonaparte's mind," he said, "was in its details low and ungentlemanly. I suppose the narrowness of his early prospects and habits stuck to him; what *we* understand by *gentlemanlike* feelings he knew nothing about."

And the Duke proceeded to enforce his point by a reminiscence of his own:

"I have a beautiful little watch . . . Buonaparte had ordered it as a present to his brother, the King of

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Spain, but when he heard of the battle of Vittoria—he was then at Dresden . . . and, one would think, sufficiently busy with other matters—when he heard of the battle of Vittoria, I say, he remembered the watch he had ordered for one whom he saw would never be King of Spain, and with whom he was angry for the loss of the battle, and he wrote from Dresden to countermand the watch, and if it should be ready, to forbid its being sent. The best apology one can make for this strange littleness is that he was offended with Joseph; but even in that case a *gentleman* would not have taken the moment when the poor devil had lost his *châteaux en Espagne*, to take away his watch also.”

Napoleon’s act of supreme littleness, his leaving a legacy to a man who had tried to assassinate Wellington, disgusted the Duke less on personal grounds, than because the testator knew there was no money out of which to pay it. “For my part,” he said, “I can see no magnanimity in a lie. . . . I confess that I think one who could play such tricks but a shabby fellow.”

That was Wellington’s perfectly sincere and consistent attitude towards the superman, Napoleon. He did not in the least underrate his genius, but it was as if the Duke, like an expert analyst, had diagnosed the inferiority complex at the heart of all that magnificence:

“He never seemed at ease, and even in the boldest things he did there was always a mixture of apprehension and meanness.”

Could Freud himself have put it with more—or as much—of accurate penetration?

As for Wellington, he refused to be impressed or overawed by an opponent whom he nicknamed

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Jonathan Wild the Great, after a famous highwayman. The whole root of his confidence that the Emperor would sooner or later be overthrown, is contained in that criticism of his not being a gentleman. That was as good as to imply that Napoleon's strength was of an inferior order; that in the last resort it was the violence of uncontrolled reaction, instead of the restrained and therefore gathered force of a magnanimous gentleness.

The real reason of the invisible blackball that debars the superman from the fellowship of gentlemen, is that the candidate is not strong enough to qualify. Gentleness turns out to be not the negation but the quintessence of strength.

*THE STRONG MAN GENTLE*

To breed for strength—that is the way common to all sorts and conditions of human societies, from the most primitive upwards. It is a notion obvious even to savages, an instinct diffused through all living species. What does rank among epoch-making discoveries of human progress, is the perfecting of strength through gentleness.

Any kraal or hut circle, any tyranny or barbarism, can rise to manly breeding; but it takes a rare and enlightened type of society to practice gentlemanly breeding—or to see why it ought to be practised. For that to the primitive—and even to certain types of advanced intelligence—is the very reverse of obvious.

The first, and most difficult point to grasp, is that the addition of gentleness to strength has the effect of rendering that strength incomparably stronger, as by applying a certain treatment to iron, you can convert it into steel. The mere will to power, breaking forth in unbridled exuberance, is, psychologically, on an inferior level to that of the form or manners imposed by gentle breeding.

We have only to delve deep enough beneath the surface of the conscious mind, to find on what insecure foundations strength without gentleness is built. It would seem an ill sort of power that is developed under the compulsion of weakness, and a sadly imperfect tyrant who is a slave to the complexes of his hidden self.

But gentle breeding permeates the whole man, and

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not only the front he shows to the world. It is a technique of mind training designed to eliminate complexes. The making of a gentleman does not, and cannot, include these disturbing elements. He does not assert himself furiously to purge the memory of some unacknowledged frustration, or to pass on some ancient kick; he feels that self-assertion on any pretext, except that of necessity, stamps a man as ill-bred. His wrath does not become "The direful spring of woes unnumbered," because a well-bred man knows how to govern his passions. He has all his powers and all their might under his complete control, and can therefore apply them with the maximum effect. He steers his course by the compass of principles; his actions have no motive above or below the surface that he needs to conceal, even from himself.

It is one of the commonplaces of breeding that it is never complete so long as it is self-conscious. Manners makyth a whole man; so long as there is the obscurest or innermost part of the self outside their scope, they fail to be the manners of a gentleman. One can go further, and say that only the incomplete gentleman has ever the least temptation to be anything else, or would even be capable of ungentleness.

Let us return for a moment to Napoleon. It is recorded that when he was First Consul and professedly no more than first citizen of a still Republican France, he was asked to a family dinner of Buonapartes, at the house of his eldest brother, Joseph. Their mother being present, Joseph very properly proposed to take her in first to dinner. This was spark enough to detonate the Napoleonic inferiority complex; the Man of Destiny claimed the place of honour for his own wife,

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Josephine. But Joseph, who, though devoid of any sort of greatness, had at least more gentlemanly feeling than his brother, proved unexpectedly firm. He had reckoned without the lightning stroke that decided the issue in a score of contested fields. In a wrath not unworthy of Achilles himself, the First Consul darted across the room, pounced upon Josephine, and fairly rushed her out of the door, thrusting aside all who stood in his path, beating his mother by a narrow but sufficient margin, and leaving poor Madame Joseph, his rightful partner, to find her way to her own table as best she might. It is not altogether surprising, under these circumstances, to learn that the other Buonapartes were so far from taking this latest victory in good part, that the rest of the evening was passed in an atmosphere of frozen constraint.

But can anyone imagine Sir Lancelot making a scene like this at King Arthur's table? Is it the sort of conduct of which Sidney would have been capable, or Bayard, or any of the acknowledged great gentlemen of history? Would any man, with the remotest pretensions to breeding, have been tempted to score such an advantage in such a way? We can go further, and ask—would Napoleon himself have done so had he been his own master? For no man, in his sober senses, desires to advertise himself, even to his own family, as a parvenu and a vulgarian; still less does it pay a budding emperor to create a leading part for himself in undignified, or ridiculous scenes.

Could there be a more glaring example of the strength of ill breeding, which is not strong enough to be gentle because it is not strong or sound all through; but possessed within of what our modern doctors call

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complexes, and our remote ancestors used to call devils?

Let us be clear, at this point, about the distinction between the ideal gentleman, and those who at any given time have borne the status or reputation of gentlemen—the nearest approaches to the ideal that breeding could produce out of imperfect human nature. No mortal gentleman, even the greatest, has ever been perfectly and ideally free from repressed weakness or temptation, ever wholly the possessor of a sound mind in a sound body. The addition of gentleness to strength has been a lesson gradually and partially learned—to claim that even now it is more than in its elementary stage would be going far indeed.

We have spoken of it as a human discovery, but here perhaps we are doing some wrong to our fellow creatures on the lower stages of life's ascent. For surely we can trace its first inklings at least among the higher vertebrates. The most savage animals can usually be relied upon to show a certain chivalry to the females and young of their species. A barnyard cock will spare the choicest morsels for members of his seraglio, and one has frequently seen a spaniel with a large and rough puppy hanging onto his long ears, causing him to squeal with pain, but without provoking the faintest attempt at retaliation.

It is perhaps owing to the long and intimate association between dog and man, that, particularly among the larger breeds, there are standards of gentlemanly conduct whose human equivalent few human beings would find it easy to satisfy; and this not only in the way of a stately and ceremonious courtesy of daily intercourse, but of a refusal, under the direst



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provocation, to take advantage of superior strength. If I may be pardoned for citing an instance so easily paralleled out of any reader's experience, I will take that of a certain Tweedle, a rather reserved and extremely dignified retriever, belonging, many years ago, to a sergeant in the Isle of Wight. It was part of Tweedle's daily routine to accompany his master to barracks by a path along the shore. This exposed him, in common with the other military dogs, to the hostilities of an outsize in Pomeranians, known—and with reason—as Fighting Sam, who, confident in the fact that his long hair rendered him practically bite-proof, was—rather in the style of one of Bunyan's giants—in the habit of offering battle to all passers by that way.

Tweedle had, for a long time, persisted in treating this kind of thing with what must have been infuriating detachment. To none of his challenger's assaults did he vouchsafe the faintest sign of notice, but stalked along with a dignity unruffled as if there had been no Sam on that side of the Solent. It was perhaps the Pomeranian spirit that encouraged its owner to interpret such forbearance as weakness, and to imagine that it was safe to proceed to all lengths of outrage. And one morning he actually succeeded in damaging poor old Tweedle's paw, in a way that could no longer be ignored.

It was an alarming sight to see the big dog swing round, as if the time had come to make an end of the nuisance once and for all. Even Sam would have got away if he could—but it was too late; the jaws were upon him. Not, however, with harmful intent. Dignified as ever, the retriever turned his assailant gently but firmly over on his back in the sand, and, holding him

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steady beneath his front paws, lay down, gazing out to sea with as dreamy an expression as if he were engaged on some exercise in yoga. It is perhaps fortunate that canine language is untranslatable, otherwise that employed by Sam in this predicament would have been enough to clear any respectable beach. But Tweedle was in no sort of hurry; he was content to lie there *regardant* for an indefinite period, until the war fever had sweated itself out of the Pomeranian system. At last, when the yaps and snarls had died into final silence, he rose and resumed his walk, leaving an unhurt but deflated adversary to digest the lesson as best he might. From that day forth, it is doubtful whether so much as the tip of Sam's tail was ever visible from the beach at about the hours of 8 in the morning and 5 in the evening.

Can it be denied that this very typical big dog handled a trying situation with all the restraint and forbearance of a great gentleman? Or that such a creature, whether he goes on two legs or four, has mastered the gentleman's prime secret of combining strength with gentleness?

Let us proceed from this elementary stage to the most advanced of all, and cite what few people will deny to be the noblest and most comprehensive description ever given of the character of the perfect gentleman—and when we say character, we are excluding all reference to the intellectual side. This is the lament over the dead Sir Lancelot, of his kinsman, Sir Ector de Maris, who had sought him vainly for seven years, and found him—thus. It would be sacrilege to quote it less fully than in the original of Sir Thomas Malory, for outside the Bible, it must rank as one of

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the two or three supremely beautiful passages of English prose.

“ ‘Ah, Lancelot,’ he said, ‘thou were the head of all Christian knights. And now, I dare say,’ said Sir Ector, ‘thou Sir Lancelot, there thou liest, that thou were never matched of earthly knight’s hand. And thou were the courtliest knight that ever bare shield; and thou were the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrode horse; and thou were the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman; and thou were the kindest man that ever struck with sword; and thou were the goodliest person that ever came among press of knights; and thou was the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies; and thou were the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest.’ ”

In other words, we have to conceive of our ideal gentleman as the mirror, or paragon, of these seven graces:—courtesy; friendship; love; kindness; comeliness; humility; valour.

In no way would it be possible to summarize more explicitly what is meant by strength made perfect in gentleness. For be it noted that though Malory, according to his chivalrous lights, is displaying his conception of the perfect gentleman, he is under no illusion of Lancelot being the perfect man, or saint. Nor indeed is Lancelot himself, whose shortcoming was so signally revealed to him, when his quest for the Holy Grail had brought him to its chapel, and when, on his presuming to approach the Mystery, he was stricken to a trance, and so remained for twenty-four days.

Malory, when he wrote this character of the perfect

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gentleman, was well aware that that of the perfect man had been laid down more than fourteen centuries previously, in the Beatitudes on the Mount, and it is worth our while to see in what way the lesser falls short of the greater perfection. For what is really astonishing is the extent to which Lancelot does succeed in qualifying for the rewards, not only of knightly grace, but of Christian blessedness. He is, in a way that would have been unintelligible to one of the ancient heroes, poor, or humble, in spirit; meek—the word is explicitly used of him; merciful; and, we can well believe, outside the athletic routine of knightly jousting, a peacemaker. Undoubtedly he would have suffered persecution with as stout a heart as any crusader who fell into infidel clutches. But only in a very qualified sense could he have been said to have hungered and thirsted after righteousness, and in no sense at all—which was his disqualification from approaching the Grail—to have been pure in heart. Nor was he of those who mourn; for he was frankly and joyously of the world, worldly. We might describe him as embodying as much of the Christian ideal as could be reconciled to the end not of personal salvation, but of breeding. Lancelot is, to a supreme degree, the man of Christian breeding. So exalted is the level that, in the twilight of the modern age, was attained in the evolution of the ideal gentleman.

Actual Sir Lancelots are no doubt as hard to meet now, as they were then; but in countries where the name of gentleman is still honoured, that ideal of the strong man gentle is always implicit in its use, and though the emphasis on the gentleness is by no means constant, there has been no serious attempt to put

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back the clock to the crudity of mere strength. For that, where it has been done, it has been necessary to scrap both the name and ideal; to talk about citizens and comrades, Nordics and Roman heroes, and let not the name of gentleman be heard in the land.

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STRENGTH made perfect in gentleness, that is the foundation upon which any ideal of a gentleman needs to be built; and not only the foundation but the most substantial part of the building. But in human, as in all other architecture, perfection demands not only soundness of construction, but a beauty of finish and ornament, most beautiful of all when it is not added to the construction, but completes it, as by vital necessity.

The complete or finished gentleman is known by his manners and by manners we mean neither more nor less than style, as applied to the art of life. Just as in literature, or painting, or any other art, it is quite conceivable to cultivate style for its own sake; so there are some humane façades which turn out to be the whole of the building. But style of this sort is, to say the least of it, far short of perfection; and when it is displayed in the art of life it takes the form of a false polish that only the most superficial observer would describe as good manners.

We should be going to the other extreme if we were to imply that style can be trusted to perfect itself in life, more than any other of the arts, without the taking of thought, and by the mere light of nature. There are no doubt nature's gentlemen as there are natural born poets, but unless nature is reinforced by education there will never be any question of these being numbered, except by a palpably insincere courtesy, among the great masters of style. No doubt we may find,

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among the most uneducated people, in the conventional sense, courtesy of no mean order, but this merely goes to show that education in manners is capable of achieving a high standard, at a pinch, in the absence of any other kind. Not, however, the highest of all. The Spanish peasant, however dignified, has not the manner of the grandee; and though the ploughman may well have more of the essential gentleman in him than the peer, it is to the last degree unlikely that he will have equally finished manners.

Just as there are artists on paper and canvas to whom the perfecting of style is an endless delight for its own sake—and that without any sort of affectation or insincerity—so there are artists of manners, who revel in the elaborations and refinements of courtesy, and wear their manners with all the fastidiousness and sometimes the foppishness of dandies. There are epicures, who derive the fine flavour of social life from the exquisite performance of ceremony. There are equally those whose polish of manners is the thinnest of veneers, that comes off the moment it is subjected to the least friction.

Manners is none the less of an art to be studied and cultivated, from the fact that none are perfect unless they are instinctive; nor any style, unless it is the man himself, and the whole man, down to the innermost depths of his being.

Thus it follows that the manners of a gentleman are perfectly expressive of that which we know to be his essential character, one of strength tempered by gentleness. They must be the manners of strength, in the sense of being self-contained and dignified; they must show no change of poise or delicacy under the

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direst stress. They are as serene and ceremonious on the field of battle as in the ball room; they are untroubled by disappointment, unruffled by anxiety, unbowed by grief; they survive even under the shadow of death. What could have been more Chesterfieldian than the last words of Chesterfield—"give Dayrolles a chair," or what more characteristic of the dying Charles II than to apologise for the length of time taken in doing so—unless indeed it be "Let not poor Nelly starve"?

It is likewise part of the manners of a gentleman to retain his gentleness under all circumstances. Neither fear nor excitement can infect them with brutality. No gentleman sees red, or needs to work himself up into baresark fury—he has himself too much in command. He is all the more formidable an opponent, if he should be driven to fight, from the calmness of his concentration upon the end in view, an end strictly limited by the necessity of the occasion; he never ceases to prefer the argument of reason to that of force, or to regard his enemy of the moment in the light of a potential friend. He has no use for the propaganda of hate, but retains the spirit of charity that strives to understand an opponent's point of view, that is loath to think evil, and whose response, even to the least forgivable outrage, is that of "Forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

It need hardly be said that these are the manners of perfect health, physical and mental. They demand above all things steadiness of nerve—no neurotic person can preserve form and style intact under stress; he can easily become a brute, but he is incapable of remaining a gentleman.



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I do not mean to imply that the style of life is bound, with the advance of civilization, to get continually more complicated and formally ceremonious. It is here as it is with every other form of art, style is liable to phases of extreme and over elaboration, which, in the normal course of things, are followed by a reaction to simplicity. After the extravagance of seventeenth-century prose comes the limpidity of Dryden and Swift; the eighteenth-century ornateness of manners is followed by a counter trend to informality that has persisted to this day. And it may be that simplicity will prove not only the starting point, but also the goal of culture.

That last word brings us to the final requirement of civilized manners. The gentleman, in his European origin, was a fighter, and all descriptions of him bear a martial implication. He was the flower of chivalry, the kindest man that ever struck with sword. His very gentleness was militant—that of the merciful knight who spares a wounded adversary for the sake of Christ.

But civilized society is, in proportion to its civilization, organized for peace; even war ceases to be a personal combat of men in armour, and becomes a battle of wits and machinery. The knight, specialized for physical combat, passes out of date as the ideal product of breeding. The gentleman is in demand for his mental and spiritual no less than his physical qualifications; and, in his ideal form, needs to combine all three in that perfect harmony for which the Greeks possessed a word that we lack—*eurhythmia*.

The knightly virtues may be needed to safeguard, but they cannot suffice for, that ideal society of ladies and gentlemen which provides for the fullest and most

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exquisite satisfaction that the cultivation of life can be made to yield. Nor can they qualify for that gift of leadership that every gentleman is expected to possess, when the most important part of leadership is no longer on the field of battle, but in the arts and amenities of peace. For if a society and culture of gentlefolk is to be tolerated under modern democratic conditions, it is not as a pale but as a pattern of living; a realization in miniature of a social well-being within at least ultimate reach of the whole community.

There is a word for the sort of manners and mental attitude by which the members of such a community are to be distinguished. It is urbanity; which of course implies the standard set by the cultured society of the town, or metropolis, as contrasted with the provincialism of those who, being away from the centre, are less permeated by civilizing influence. In process of time, and particularly that time during which culture, like fashion, took its tone from Paris, the notion of urbanity had become sufficiently defined for all practical purposes.

Urbanity, in brief, is a style of life designed to eliminate every sort of friction from the wheels of social intercourse. It is a willing and intelligent co-operation towards the achievement of that manifold and subtle well-being, those highest delights of intellectual beauty, that such intercourse can be made to yield. The urbane man is our fundamental gentleman, our strong man gentle, transferred and adapted from the rough and tumble of personal combat to an environment in which the keenest contests are the dialectic of ideas, and in which pleasures of the mind excite a more delicious gust than those of the body.

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Perfect urbanity is thus the art of manners in its most consummate form; those who possess it are so trained and disciplined in its utmost refinements, that their training has become part of themselves, and their lives are masterpieces by inward necessity. It is the mark of the urbane man that all he says and does is directed not to the furtherance of his own will to power, but towards the common good of the whole society. Neither in deed nor in word is he ever combative; the only victory for which he strives is that of the light in whose radiance all can share. He never talks for the sake of displaying his own parts, or in order to score at the expense of somebody else. Nobody ever feels humiliated or put out because of him; even when he insinuates disagreement, he does so with a suggestion of flattery that is fully sincere, because its source is an habitual charity; the other man does not feel as if his idea had been refuted, but more as if it had been carried a stage further; as if, by some sympathetic *tour de force*, this new friend had understood, even better than himself, what was in his mind. It is perhaps the supreme achievement of good manners to diffuse such an influence as to bring to the surface the best that is in every member of the company, and to make everyone present feel on the best of terms both with himself and with his neighbours.

This is no dream of Cloud-cuckooland. It has been realized time and again; there are persons whose mere presence in a company has had the effect—not once, but habitually—of transforming what would otherwise have been a fortuitous concourse of commonplace individuals into a scintillating galaxy of hitherto unsuspected brilliance.

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I hope I may be forgiven if, instead of the many instances that one might cite of this sort of power from the pages of history, I take one familiar to all King's men of a certain standing—that of my own, and such a multitude of other men's dear old friend, Colonel Roy Truscott, who, without any of the usual undergraduate athletic qualifications—his notorious distaste for any sort of exercise caused him, in fact, to be affectionately nicknamed the Sloth—achieved so unprecedented a popularity as to have given him a phenomenal, and perhaps a lasting influence, on the distinctive tone of King's society. In his time there was a unity of spirit in the college such as is not common in a community divided, as a rule, into more or less exclusive cliques. But the clique spirit was largely in abeyance during Truscott's time, because all sets, without distinction, used to meet in his rooms on a footing of perfect cordiality. One would see men who, in the ordinary way, were notoriously not on speaking terms, hobnobbing like old cronies—their host used to take a particular pleasure in effecting such conjunctions—"my rooms," he would say, "are the horns of the altar."

And yet, though he said some excellent things, he was in no sense what one would have called a brilliant talker. Often he took a very minor part in the conversation, only interjecting some little, humorous comment now and then. And yet, by sheer magic of personality, he would make his presence continually felt; he made everything go, and—in some undefinable way—not only achieved popularity for himself, but in a perceptible degree for everybody else in the eyes of his neighbours. "When good fellows get together"—

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that was what everybody could not but feel about these unforgettable gatherings.

The greatest triumph of all was on the last occasion I saw him, more than thirty years later, stricken down prematurely, half paralyzed and only able to articulate three words. And yet, such was the triumph of spirit over matter, that he was able to carry it off at his own dinner table with the old magic touch, infecting everyone so much with his indomitable high spirits, that there were times when one could almost forget the unspeakable pathos of it all.

That, I trust, may illustrate what I mean by talking of urbanity as the last essential quality of the civilized gentleman. It can, in its highest form, effect something like a transfiguration of its possessor's special environment; and when it is common, in any considerable degree, to all the members of a society, we come to realize the truth of the old Greek saying, that while men come together in order to live, they remain together in order to live well.

But if we are to live as well as life can be lived, there is no evading the necessity for something more than simple goodness and gentleness of character. The higher the degree of civilization, the more dominating becomes the part of the intellect, or of that blending of the intellectual and aesthetic faculties which goes to form the cultured personality. If we are to accept the leadership of gentlemen, we cannot evade the necessity of their being qualified by brains no less than by heart and sinews. The day of salvation by the pure fool is long past, nor is Mr. Greatheart equipped with the whole armour of a gentleman unless he is equally entitled to the style of Greathead.

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To sum up, then: the four essentials that go to the making of a gentleman are strength, gentleness, manners, and urbanity or culture; or, as we might put it in somewhat less precise terms, heart, spirit, form, and brain.

BOOK II

*THE GENTLEMAN IN THE MAKING*





*THE UNGENTLE PAST*

THIS idea of the strong man gentle—how old it is; and how rare!

So many of the world's proudest civilizations have flourished and decayed, without more than the most rudimentary inkling of what to our minds constitutes gentle breeding. Up to quite a short time ago, all of antiquity that mattered to an educated man was comprised in his classics and his Bible. But neither the Greeks and Romans, on the one hand, nor the Chosen People, on the other, could have afforded him any very satisfactory guide to the way in which a gentleman is expected to go.

Even the Greeks, who mastered every other accomplishment, were at best novices in this. How seldom, either in fact or legend, do we meet with anyone whom we can call, without considerable qualification, a Greek and a gentleman! Certainly not that magnificent savage, that grown-up spoilt child, Achilles; even less the man of many wiles, the human fox, who is the hero of the Odyssey.

As were his epic heroes, so was his ideal, to the Greek of real life. It seemed to him as clear as day that strength and cunning were to be employed for all they were worth; and to the suggestion of being "the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies" he would probably have replied, that so effeminate a man was only fit to eat in such company.

I remember it being a rather agreeable relief from

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the ordinary classroom grind of a private school to be set the question, "Which would you rather have belonged to—Athens or Sparta?" I unhesitatingly planked for Athens: the Spartan menu was decisive. But I fancy it would be considerably harder to face up to, "Which would have been the fitter location for a gentleman?" unless indeed you might be accorded full marks for an oblique "Neither."

For the Spartans, it will suffice to quote the judgment of Sir Frederick Pollock, against which I think there will be little disposition to appeal:

"To me," he says, "they have always appeared the most odious impostors in the whole history of antiquity . . . with all their pretentious discipline they produced in the whole course of their wars only two officers who are known to have been gentlemen, Brasidas and Callicratidas."<sup>1</sup> Gentlemen, that is to say, not by the exacting standards of a later age, but by some recorded contrast of decency with the sheer bullying brutality—not to speak of the avarice and crookedness—that were the common form of Spartan virtue.

The Athenians were certainly more civilized, but their civilization had little in it of that which goes to the making of a gentleman. In that fickle, remorseless, and utterly unscrupulous democracy of slaveholders, there was no room for meekness and gentleness, and not much for kindness: it was every man for himself, and exile or the hemlock take—sooner or later—even the greatest. The supremely representative Athenian gentleman (if we must use the word) is Alcibiades, the most magnificent of all adventurers, who could drink not only the cup of pleasure, but that of treason,

<sup>1</sup> *The Beginnings of Political Science*. p. 11.

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to the dregs, and who figured in succession, as the spoilt darling, the ruin, and the saviour of his native city.

It was fitting that the Greek spirit should have found its conquering hero in the great Alexander, who might almost have been Achilles come to life again, with his uncontrolled passions, his occasional moods of generosity alternating with explosions of black savagery—one who we feel might, in a different environment, have blossomed into a great gentleman, instead of the very different being he actually proved.

But in Greece, one can at least say that there was no such absolute and systematic ban upon all that we call gentlemanly, as there was in Rome, in those great days when her spirit was still Roman and had not evaporated into that of a cosmopolitan empire. It would have been hardly possible to double the parts of gentleman and patriotic Roman, since Rome expected of every one of her citizens that he should merge his own personality, without stint, in the will to power that was the soul of the state. To this will everything had to give way—any human or chivalrous impulses would be a countervailing force, and, as such, anti-social. Rome might, in her own interests, make her yoke easy for those who would submit; but for none who stood in her path was there ruth or mercy. The more gallant the foe, the greater the delight in wreaking the last extremity of vengeance on him.

The institution of the Triumph, the most characteristically Roman of all ceremonies, implied the flat denial of all those feelings that animate the soul of a gentleman. It was a vast ceremonial gloating over a beaten enemy, culminating in the cruel murder of the

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enemy leader.<sup>1</sup> It is no wonder that as the will to power came to prevail over a wider and wider area, it became a will to cruelty on a proportionate scale; that the Roman people found its chief delight in orgies of spectacular sadism, and the horrors of mass slavery grew to a height far beyond the worst Greek precedent.

In such a school, how was it possible to temper strength with gentleness? It is true that Rome, before she became corrupted with the wealth of her own conquests, was capable of breeding an austere and dignified virtue, but this, though admirable enough in its way, was without the least touch of gentleness. There was not even the jealousy of personal honour that fired the gentry of a later age: there were no duels by the Tiber. It would seem as if Roman honour had been too impersonal to be thin-skinned, to the extent of demanding satisfaction, even for the sheer Billingsgate that grave senators thought nothing of hurling at each other.

In such an environment, one might as soon expect to meet with a unicorn as a gentleman. The extraordinary thing is that we find any glimmerings of gentleness at all, as we do in exceptional cases like that of Cicero, who was not only a charming friend, but even—for a Roman—a considerate master. Still more extraordinary is it to behold, in the greatest and sternest age of the Republic, the emergence—in defiance of all apparent probability—of a leader in every respect the opposite of the Roman type, a genius and an undisputable gentleman; I mean the conqueror of Hannibal, young Scipio Africanus, the man who could accomplish the miracle of winning the esteem even of his country's

<sup>1</sup> A fine old custom that seems about to be revived, for the benefit of the last Austrian patriots.

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bitterest enemies. There is no more dramatic episode than that of the simultaneous arrival, at the court of the Numidian King Syphax, of Scipio, fresh from the conquest of Spain, and his defeated opponent, the Carthaginian Hasdrubal. It was a situation to which only such tact and charm as that of Scipio would have been equal, but he carried it off, sharing the same couch, at the royal table, with his formidable fellow guest, and winning not only his confidence, but outspoken admiration.

Even more impressive, and quite unique in the annals of Rome, is the meeting between this same Scipio, and Carthaginian Hannibal, the most formidable enemy, and the most hated, that Rome ever had, on the eve of the final and decisive battle between them, which was to decide the mastery of the Western world. Of this, surely as momentous an interview as ever took place between man and man, we know all too little. But we do know that the old and young heroes talked together with all the confidence and mutual respect of generous natures; and though they decided that there was no choice before them but to fight it out, it seems a more than probable inference that they fixed up between them, in the event of a Roman victory, the terms of peace, so un-Roman in their generosity, to the offer of which Scipio did in fact commit his country, and which Hannibal forced his own diehards into conceding. It was as if Foch and Hindenburg had had the power, and wisdom, to have met together before the Allies' final offensive, and to have said:

"Let us each do his duty, and fight this thing to a finish; but, however that goes, you and I must see to it that our politicians make peace, as we soldiers have

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made war, in the spirit of gentlemen, and without loss of honour to either side."

It would have been better so.

Scipio, however, is one of those freaks of genius that defy explanation on any evolutionary theory—they just happen, inconsequentially, as it seems, and leave no heirs. It is small wonder that the Romans rewarded their deliverer with all the ingratitude of misunderstanding. To be a genius was bad enough; to be a gentleman was unpardonable, and a mistake that, for many a long day, few noble Romans were tempted to repeat. We have to wait for the blossoming of the Stoic philosophy in such personalities as that of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, before the idea of gentle breeding gets translated into Latin. And even he, who could rejoice at the thought of forgiving an enemy, and who practised so sweet a charity of daily intercourse—even he would seem to have been lacking in the spontaneity of the complete gentleman. It is as if his goodness were a painfully studied lesson, as if he were perpetually and consciously on his best behaviour. And so, when the light of his conscious reason played him false, he had no inner voice to warn him of being off the right path, and could revert to something worse than the worst old Roman form, in his treatment of that very Christianity whose destiny it was to preserve all that was enduring of the Roman heritage.

But we need not stress overmuch what is after all a debatable point. Even if we allow Marcus to have possessed, like Scipio, the essential quality of a gentleman, or if we bring forward, among the Greeks, names like those of Pericles, and perhaps—another fine debating issue—Socrates, it will not alter the fact that

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the gentleman, in the classical world, was as rare and lucky a phenomenon as a four-leafed clover.

But among the Chosen People of the Palestinian uplands, that diminutive community whose influence in history was so amazingly out of proportion to its size—shall we not discover the genesis of this, as of so many other fruitful conceptions? In a sense, perhaps, yes—just in so far as we may regard the Jew as being the very unwilling progenitor of the Christian. But—with the exception of those two grand Psalms, the 15th, and the 112th—in what other national literature shall we find so much that is sublime mingled with so little that can be remotely called gentlemanly? What other people would be proud to take its name and birthright from so low a fellow as the original Israel, the son who could stoop to defraud his old blind father, in order to cheat his brother out of a blessing? What other people would have gloried in relieving the inhabitants of Egypt of all the jewelry and other items of portable value that they could collar in the confusion of their departure? What other people would have devoted the grandest of its national songs to the episode of a lady who, in a land where hospitality was sacred, could invite a fugitive commander to the sanctuary of her tent, and then having got him to sleep, curry favour with the winning side by piously transfixing his skull with a tent nail? And finally, what other people could have discovered its hero king, the man after its Lord's own heart, in so chequered a personality as that of David, whom honest old Queen Victoria—for all her piety—declared that she would not know in Heaven.

Is there, one may well ask, a more nauseating episode in the whole annals of crime, than that of the

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carefully planned murder, by this elderly lecher, of the most loyal and devoted of his officers, one of the foreigners in his service, and a very gallant gentleman, if we may trust the story of his refusing to take a night's leave from the front at his own home, and insisting on being detailed for guard duty over his Sovereign's person,—the Sovereign who had taken advantage of his absence at the front, to seduce his wife, and who could hear, with no other feelings than these of furtive relief, such words as: "The ark, and Israel, and Judah abide in tents, and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into my house, and eat, and drink, and lie with my wife? As thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing."

Is there, I repeat, anything more nauseating, than David's method of covering up his own traces by first plying the unsuspecting husband with drink—to keep him out of harm's way until the final arrangements were completed—and then entrusting him with the order for that meanest of all forms of murder, which consists in abandoning a comrade to the weapons of the enemy?

I should be inclined to answer that there is one, and only one, fouler deed of treachery on human record, and that this must likewise be debited to the account of David. If there was any person to whom he owed a greater debt of loyalty than to the murdered captain of his bodyguard, it was to the commander-in-chief himself, his nephew Joab. True, the old warrior was as tough and hard-bitten, and had as short a way with anyone who stood in his path, as might be expected from one who had passed a lifetime in the sort of war-



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fare that David, from his days as a brigand chief, had been in the habit of conducting. But the one guiding principle in Joab's long military career had been loyalty to his kinsman. As outlaws and fugitives, the two must frequently have shared the same cloak under the desert stars; it was the military genius of Joab that had put David on the throne and made his reign glorious; it was Joab, who when overwhelming disaster had fallen upon his master, and all others had followed the star of the young man Absalom, went out with him on the old desert path of exile, keeping in hand the picked company of guardsmen whom he forged into the spear-head of a victorious counter-revolution; the lord Joab, now, after half a century of devoted service, in the honoured evening of his days.

But David, older still, is beginning to break up, and has called his heir to his bedside, to leave his last instructions. How at such a time could he forget Joab? And what else should he remember than one or two accomplished vendettas, which, passed over at the time, have now begun to prick the sensitive conscience of Bathsheba's second husband. Besides, anyone so powerful as Joab is safest out of the way. But the fellow's notorious loyalty would render his premature taking off dangerously shocking to public opinion. Accordingly the dying monarch falters out words, on which any conceivable comment seems hopelessly inadequate:

"Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There is just the possibility, however, that these words may have been put into David's mouth after his death, to justify the blood purge that Solomon found it prudent to undertake on his accession. But it is quite evident that David's reputation, as the ideal king, was, if anything, confirmed thereby.

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One might deduce that in ancient Hebrew society, any person who should evince signs of gentlemanly feeling, would get short shrift. Which indeed is just what we do find. The generous Esau is beaten at every point by his crooked brother; the noble Saul, and the knightly Jonathan, whom even David admitted to be lovely and pleasant in their lives, were doomed from the moment the old intriguer, Samuel, took upon him to anoint the son of Jesse as anti-king; and the gallant Ahab, far more fitted than David for the part of patriot hero, and not the least of whose crimes, in prophetic eyes, was that of magnanimity to a beaten foe, has been pilloried, for all posterity, as one of the arch villians of history.

Let not this be taken as an attempt to disparage the Bible or to provide material for anti-Semitic propaganda. Jewish civilization, perhaps even more than Greek and Roman, has made its vital contribution to human progress. Among all the books ever written, that which contains the flower of Hebrew literature will always stand by itself as *The Book*. What Greece, Rome, and Palestine, have produced of immortal value, can never be fully reckoned. But except sporadically and, as it were, against the grain of their own genius, they do not produce that particular phenomenon of which we happen to be in quest, or give birth to its accompanying ideal.

Not at least until the rise of the invisible Empire which proved stronger than that even of Rome, but whose affiliation to Judaism all loyal Jews have united in repudiating.

And yet there were gentlemen, long before there were heroes in Greece or judges in Israel; gentlemen

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not by accident, but by breeding, the normal and expected product of the society in which they lived. The oldest of all books that have survived the ravages of time are concerned with this very subject—the making of a gentleman. They emanate from the world's most ancient civilization—some would say its happiest and most peaceful—Egypt of the first two millenia, that long, fruitful valley, shut off, by its protecting sands, from the fear of invasion, and not yet bitten by the fever of imperialism.

Under such almost ideal conditions; where the Sun God, Ra, never hid the light of his countenance except for sleep; where the corn god, Osiris, lavished his abundance without rain; and where the man god, the Pharaoh, gave his people the blessing of a peace that was not even the preparation for war—it was only natural that men should have found energy to divert from the mere struggle for life, to the art of making life beautiful.

It was no doubt among a relatively small upper class that this art was brought to its full perfection, though abundant pictorial and written evidence suggests much less a tyranny of whips and taskmasters, than a contented Toryism, in which all classes co-operated with a cheerful enthusiasm of which the Pyramids, like Chartres Cathedral, were no more than the supreme and symbolic expression.

In those old, peaceful days, before Egypt became an empire, there was no Achilles by the banks of the Nile—wrath like his would have found neither an enemy on which to wreak itself, nor a bard to praise it; nor would such a king as David have made a Pharaoh after the heart of Horus or Osiris.

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Not Rome then, nor Greece, nor Palestine, but the far more ancient Egypt, can claim to be the birthplace of the gentleman, in the sense in which we have agreed to use the word, as implying strength made perfect in gentleness. That strength was honoured above all other things by the ancient Egyptians is, literally, as obvious as the pyramids; the art of that archaic and supreme period is, in all its surviving products, the outward and visible manifestation of a strength that has never been surpassed, if it has ever been equalled. But it has not, like that which glorified the imperial Pharaohs of a later age, become boastful and power-drunken. Noblest of all is this most ancient Egypt in its artistic restraint, that achieves, with the severest economy of means, the expression of heroic self mastery.

It is the message of the pyramids; it is the secret of the Sphinx; it is the soul of that Pharaoh Khephren, who was the Sphinx himself, as we see his image carved in diorite, and seated in eternal majesty on its lion throne. It is a strength that is too proud to be violent, too sure of itself for self-assertion, so much the master of its passions that, like the horses of a skilled charioteer, it responds to the gentlest touch. It may be the supreme proof of such strength that it is able to hold itself in perpetual reserve.

“Cause not fear among men”—the words are those of a minister statesman, garnering the fruits of his experience in this remotest of civilized antiquity—“for this likewise the god punisheth. . . . There is a man who saith ‘power’ and he saith, ‘I seize for myself that which I perceive.’ Thus a man speaketh and he is smitten down . . . it is another that attaineth by giving unto

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him that hath not, not he that causeth men dread. . . .  
Live therefore in the house of kindliness.”<sup>1</sup>

It makes one inclined to despair of human progress when one thinks that these words could have been written fifty centuries, more or less, before our age of power cults and sacred egotism, and when one thinks how speedy an end there would be to our present fears and anxieties, if such gentlemen as this Ptah Hotep controlled the destinies of nations.

<sup>1</sup> From *The Instructions of Ptah Hotep*, translated by Battiscombe G. Gunn.

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It is not so much a case of asking whether the gentleman *has* happened to adorn this or that phase of civilization, as of whether he *could* have done so. So far is gentleness from being a plant that flourishes on any soil, that conditions are necessary for its appearance, in the absence of which perhaps the majority of human societies might be described as "gentlemen barred."

Among these we should have to include all those in which the exigences of war or religion have imposed a cult of strength unlimited, and a consequent veto on gentleness. There were no gentlemen in such robber and raider empires as that of ancient Assyria—one glance at faces of its human, bull-gods would be enough to settle that matter—or among the hordes of Attila. We should find it difficult to talk of the kindest man that ever burnt child before Moloch, or the meekest man and the gentlest that ever flayed captive.

For precisely the same reason, we need not look for the breeding of gentlemen, in our own time, under militaristic tyrannies, that deliberately set out to be nurseries of organized brutality. A gentleman murderer, a gentleman bully, a gentleman Jew-baiter, are things inconceivable. Gentlemen do not talk of egoism as sacred, or endure the surrender of their individual honour and conscience into the keeping of whatever adventurer may have usurped control of the state machine. Nor, for that matter, does the gentlemanly nature function with that frictionless conformity

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required in a machine part. No tyrant, who knows his business, will cultivate gentle breeding among his subjects.

All of which merely amounts to saying that you cannot, at one and the same time, cultivate ungentleness and breed gentlemen. But to grasp this is to rule out of our survey many of the proudest and most splendid communities of which we have record. Babylon, Carthage, Tyre—they, and their kind, lie outside the sphere of our present interest. The idea of which we are in quest has not dawned upon them.

The flower of gentle manners is thus, on certain soils, precluded from growing at all. But there are others on which it may indeed spring up, but without ever coming to more than a stunted or limited maturity. As we have already remarked, in another connection, there were several different species of Man that nature tried out and discarded, before she finally pitched upon *homo sapiens*. And so we find more than one civilization evolving a type to which we cannot refuse the name of gentleman, with an accompanying code, often of the most elaborate manners; that yet in some subtle, but unmistakable way, fails to realize our ideal of the complete gentleman. Or again, we find what seem to be false starts—high-hearted chivalry that belies its own promise, like the seed that springs up on stony soil.

Such, I think, is what we feel about the profound and ancient civilization of India. Never were the foundations of gentle breeding laid with such apparent sureness, as in the great epic sagas that are at once a school of character and philosophy for the educated Hindu—the story of Rama, the divine hero, and that of the war between the Pandava brothers and the Kurus.

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In comparison with the heroes of these legends, those of Homer seem ruffianly barbarians. Their code of honour—if any criticism must be passed on it—is almost too fantastically high to be believable. In that war of the Pandavas, the five young princes have been held at bay by the prowess of that magnificent veteran, their uncle, Bhishma. They know that Bhishma, like Achilles, is unconquerable, except for a weakness of which only he himself possesses the secret. There is but one thing to do, if the right cause is to prevail; they must find the truth from his own lips. And so after that day's battle, they repair to their uncle's tent—for at sunset all hostilities are suspended—and explain to him their difficulty. And Bhishma, who has taught them so many things, does not hesitate to tell them this too, and in due course receives his mortal wound at their hands.

Or where is there a more beautiful story than that of these same five princes, now grown old, setting forth on their last pilgrimage to find the heaven that was believed to lie somewhere beyond the Northern mountains? All fell by the way, in the trackless snows, except the eldest, Yudisthira, who finally struggled up the mount of heaven with no other companion than a dog, who had followed him from the plains. Indra, the sky god, is about to open the celestial gate to the first man who has ever reached it, save through that of death, when he espies the companion by whose entry the whole of Heaven would be defiled. But Yudisthira stands firm: he will go to Hell and torment rather than abandon that humblest and meanest of friends. He turns his back on heaven, but is soon recalled, for the dog turns out to be no less than Dharma, God of Duty,



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who has taken canine form to put Yudisthera's virtue to the supreme test. And so, as in the story of another pilgrimage, all the trumpets sound on the other side for this ideally complete gentleman.

And yet, after so fair a sowing, there is something disappointing, from our point of view, about the harvest. It is not that Hindu civilization has at any time been barren of chivalrous magnanimity in its fighting stocks and noble houses; but no development of gentle manners is to be recorded remotely comparable to that which in the West added such rare and manifold enrichment to the art of life. There were no salons by the Ganges. Who could conceive of a Hindu counterpart to Sir Philip Sidney? Even the greatest souled Mahrajahs were after all not essentially different in manners and outlook from other Oriental potentates.

But where are we to look for the cause of this failure of Hindustan to yield any such fruit of gentle breeding as one might reasonably have expected on the analogy of the West? Some subtle blight would seem to have infected the growing plant; nor, after our previous survey, shall we have much difficulty in diagnosing its source.

For breeding, by its very nature, is, not only physically, but spiritually, an achievement of co-operation between the sexes. Herein the part played by the weaker is equal, if not superior, in importance, to that of the stronger. Who but the mother to be can judge, by intuition, of the fittest man to beget heirs of her body? And who but the weaker partner can appreciate the finer points of those manners whose code constitutes the great charter of feminine liberties?

Gentleness of manners is born, even among animals,

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in the voluntary refusal of the male to avail himself of his superior strength. It is in hall among ladies that Sir Lancelot is called meek and gentle. It is in the equal intercourse of the sexes that courtesy takes on its most exquisite shades of refinement. Take away the stimulus of feminine influence, and men have no incentive to become gentlemen. And the man who, by crudely asserting his physical advantage, exchanges a partner for a drudge or a sexual convenience, is degrading his own soul as much as hers, and cutting himself off from his most fruitful source of inspiration.

Here, I venture to suggest lies the besetting weakness of Indian, as—to a greater or less extent—of all Oriental civilization. It is essentially a one sex affair; there is neither equality nor partnership. The Hindu lady becomes a prisoner for life, and a great deal worse than a prisoner, shut up, during her lord's lifetime, in the strict confinement of the purdah, and after his decease—before an unsympathetic Raj imposed its veto—condemned to an agonizing death on his pyre. She was even, in course of time, bamboozled into embracing her chains with a sort of pride.

That is no doubt highly gratifying to masculine self-esteem. But a victory that makes prisoners of half—not to speak of the better half—of one's own army, is suicide. Knock out the feminine partnership, and you are infecting your social intercourse with sterility. You may breed gentlemen, but—to use an expression that I first heard in India—they will never be more than second class gentlemen.

That is why, in a book of this scope and compass, it becomes necessary to give a regretful go-by to the kinds of gentlemen evolved by the great civilizations East

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of Suez. That study would no doubt be as fruitful as it would be fascinating; and it would be patently absurd to refuse the style of gentleman to many a grave and dignified Oriental, or to belittle a courtesy that of its own kind need fear no Western rivalry. But our interest must necessarily be concentrated on the line of development that offers the most hopeful approach we can conceive of, to the ideal of the complete gentleman. And that, I venture to submit, can only be where the social intercourse and interplay of the sexes is afforded freest scope—as in the Christian West.

The veil, the seraglio, polygamy, the claim to unconditional obedience, the crushed feet, the suttee—what are these but so many assertions of the will to power unlimited, by one half of mankind over another, and, as such, the negation of gentleness? The view of life that deprives that other half of a soul, or an independent spiritual existence—is it not in its very essence ungentlemanly? Yet this is the standpoint that every normal Oriental instinctively assumes—a fact that is often realized too late by those Western women who have been imprudent enough to yield to the fascination of some brown or yellow suitor.

It is not enough that this state of things is mitigated, as in China, by an elaborate code of ceremonial courtesy within the limits of the family, or—as in both China and India—by the high degree of reverence accorded to the mother. Life, and manners, cannot thus be confined within closed compartments of domestic exclusiveness. The fine art of breeding is as much a matter of bisexual co-operation as breeding in the cruder sense. You may evolve a sort of gentleman out of purely masculine intercourse, just as hen birds who have passed all their

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lives in the chastity of a solitary cage, have been known to lay some sort of an occasional egg. But such eggs, and gentlemen, are somewhat lacking in completeness.

It is after all a matter of taste, in which everyone is free to choose for himself. There may well be those whose ideal gentleman would be embodied in the form of some urbane and ceremonious mandarin; some patriarchal sheikh of the desert; some warrior chief of a Rajput clan. Their choice is entitled to all respect, and certainly no one can prove it wrong. My own is different, and for reasons that I hope will commend themselves at least to Western readers. That hope is strengthened by the fact that such readers are likely to be at least fifty per cent feminine.

And yet it is not without a regretful back glance that one sets one's face Westward. For East has not been East so utterly and all the time as Kipling's famous line would suggest. And it is just where the Oriental cult of sex domination is for some reason suspended, that we recognize what, even by Western reckoning, is the authentic gentlemanly touch.

To revert for a moment to that civilization of old India. Much of the charm that invests its legends arises from the fact that, even down to the time of the Mohammedan conquest in the 11th century, ladies of princely stock seem to have been exempted from the subjection of their humbler sisters. This is clear from the very ancient custom by which a Princess was allowed to choose her own bridegroom out of an assembly of noble suitors all competing for her hand with feats of knightly prowess.

One of the most famous of these assemblies was held as late as the 11th century at the court of the Raja of

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Jaichand, whose daughter was secretly in love with gallant young Prithvi Raj, scion of an enemy house. So little was his presence expected among the other Princes, that an image of him had been set up by way of a derisive substitute. But when the great moment arrived for the final choice, it was on the neck of the image that the Princess cast her wreath. While they were still gasping in surprise, there was a thunder of hooves; the real Prithvi had snatched her to his saddle bow, and was off across the wilds, with the whole pack of them trailing—vainly—in pursuit.

It was one of the great, tragic love affairs of history. Not many years had passed before Prithvi had fallen, the last champion of a free Hindustan against the Moslem. And his widow, in the true Hindu spirit, passed to him through the flames, as freely as she had chosen him for her earthly bridegroom.

Nor can we leave the East without some reference to the Japanese code of feudal chivalry, known as Bushido. For here we do have, explicitly formulated, an ideal of strength made perfect in gentleness. The Japanese warrior, though disciplined to the sternest austerity of militarism—poetical composition being tabooed as effeminate, and dancing expiated by nothing less than suicide—was also enjoined to cultivate the virtues of benevolence, gentleness, and sympathy. Nothing of the nature of bersark fury was permitted to him—the brutal warrior, it was recognized, is likely to be a bad warrior. It was in this feudal Japan, in which Bushido had its origin—or rather, its adaptation from Chinese sources—that we also find the brightest promise that the East ever afforded, of a style of life based on the equal co-operation of the sexes. It is diffi-

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cult for us to realize that the time when Ethelred the Unready was swilling mead with his thanes in the intervals of collecting Danegeld, and an Archbishop of Canterbury being pelted to death with freshly gnawed beef bones for not collecting it, was, at the other end of the world, the heyday of a court life so brilliant and sophisticated as to make the smartest modern society seem only a shade less barbarous, by comparison, than that patronized by Ethelred.

Who can dispute it, who studies such records of that time as have come down to us—the most precious of all being the day to day jottings of a certain Lady Sei Shonagon, who was maid of honour to the young Empress, and a poetess of distinction in an environment where the art of improvising exquisite verse, in proportionately beautiful script, was one of which every gentleman and lady was expected to be master.<sup>1</sup>

Here indeed, among the select circle of high-born people of whom Shonagon was one, we have feminine freedom raised to a height that would move the envy of our brightest young people. A young lady of the court thought nothing of taking to herself any eligible lover who happened to attract her fancy, and Shonagon is at her most amusing in commenting on the technique of such affairs. What can be more ill-judged than to get up a tiff in the small hours of a very cold morning, and to quit the big bed, in a sulk—so that after a time you are ignominiously frozen to a reconciliation!

It is impossible not to see in this state of things some analogy to the European springtime of the troubadour age in Provence; and we might have expected such a

<sup>1</sup> There is one excellent, though selective, translation by Arthur Waley and Nobuko Kabayashi.

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subsequent unfolding of chivalrous and courtly manners as we find in Europe. But there is no summer to fulfil the promise of that Eastern spring. Japanese society, during the nine ensuing centuries, retains a charm and delicacy all its own, but that is in no sense progressive. Indeed the dazzling and artificial brilliancy of court life at the close of the tenth century is never quite recovered. The spirit of the Orient was stronger than that of Shonagon and her circle. The Japanese woman never achieved a sufficient measure either of liberty or equality to become arbitress of elegancies, or to add gentleness to breeding.

Nor can the theoretical gentleness of Bushido be said to have compensated for the deficiency. A cultivated ruthlessness, to himself no less than others, seems to have been the invariable practice of the Japanese warrior from the time of that famous and heroic civil war, nearly two centuries after Shonagon's time, between the two ruling families, in which the victors ended by exterminating the vanquished, except for such of the ladies as could afford more pleasure in another capacity. It is one respect, at least, in which the national character has remained unaffected by the process of Westernization. Amid the politics of murder, the statesmanship of brigandage, and the warfare of massacre, it is perhaps tactless to revert to the question of John Ball, and enquire

“Who then—in modern Japan—is the gentleman?”

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WE return then to the West, for it is there or nowhere that we must look for the fulfilment of those conditions that we require to produce the kind of gentleman, the strong man of gentle breeding, that we have set out to seek.

The somewhat depressing result of our previous survey, may at least have been helpful in showing the extreme improbability of such conditions being fulfilled at the same time in any given civilization. There is reason to think that something of the sort may have taken place in old Egypt—but where else? Not on the Euphrates or the Indus, not wholly and indisputably even in ceremonious China or artistic Japan.

Nor is there much more apparent promise among the classical and Biblical progenitors of our own civilization, of any sustained ideal of gentlemanly conduct. But germs that are barren apart may be fruitful united. And such union was consummated in what must beyond doubt rank as the most fruitful birth of all time, that of the Christian faith.

For our purpose it will be enough to regard this as we should any other phenomenon of history; it will in fact only serve to bring into clearer relief the unique human significance of its Founder. Here, at last, Hebrew civilization produces as complete a gentleman, in the ideal sense, as it is possible to imagine. For in Christ we find every one of the requirements for which we have stipulated. He has strength; such strength as is the



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crown of a nature exuberantly vital, now bursting forth in torrential denunciation, now dissolving into tears of agony—yet tempered, not to the cold self-restraint of the Stoic model, but to a divine compassion and sympathy.

What is most significant and startling of all is an attitude to women that in an Oriental environment is revolutionary beyond precedent. Modern beyond modernity, one might add, if we may judge from the Christ fashioned in the likeness of his own wish dream by that arch-druid of the modern phallus, D. H. Lawrence, who, in one of his later stories, pictures a still living Crucified One escaping privately from the Tomb, and resolving to cure himself of the itch for saving the world, by giving his carnal instincts play in a *liaison* with a suitable partner. Any stallion or he-goat could have displayed as much originality. But it took something like divine genius for the real Son of Man to set the example, in His own circle, of a social intercourse in which the feminine element is accorded a spiritual value at least equal to that of the hitherto predominant partner. There would seem to have been no company from which He derived such genuine pleasure as that of the strangely assorted group of women friends, who rewarded Him with a loyalty that so signally failed Him in His male disciples.

One of the few Christian appreciations of Christ that display something of a detached insight is surely the Elizabethan Dekker's—"the first true gentleman that ever lived."

Nor was it only the Founder of Christianity who in that age and environment merited the name of gentleman. For the great missionary genius, who transformed

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a local and Jewish cult into a religion capable of transforming Western civilization, turns out to have been one of the conspicuously great gentlemen of history—and to have owed his success in no small measure to this very cause. Paul of Tarsus is one of the few—perhaps the only one—of inspired enthusiasts, to temper that enthusiasm with the tact and accommodating reasonableness of a no less inspired good manners. He was a past master of the diplomatist's, and for that matter, the gentleman's art, of becoming all things to all men, and this in no Machiavellian sense, but as the direct application of that charity which he exalted to the rank of a crowning virtue.

Paul's technique, it will be noticed, is everywhere the same. Charity is the master key to open all locks—concentrate on what is noblest in every man's nature, and build upon it. Approach the zealots of Judaism from the standpoint of a good Jew, "zealous towards God as ye are to this day"; among the Athenian intelligentsia come as a scholar to the fount of scholarship, and break the ice with a graceful compliment to their piety;<sup>1</sup> approach the chiefs of the Roman occupation with such dignity as befits the *civis Romanus* in face of Caesar's representative. The one specimen of Paul's private correspondence that has come down to us, addressed to Philemon, is a masterpiece of persuasive urbanity that would have delighted Cicero. But the greatest triumph of all, not even excepting his Chesterfieldian touch in handling the half-westernized kinglet, Herod Agrippa, was the way in which he succeeded in working round those obstinate and

<sup>1</sup> "Ye are too superstitious" would appear to be a mistranslation for "extremely religious."

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suspicious reactionaries of the original apostolate, to a friendly compromise that should leave him free to propagate his own very different gospel to the Gentiles beyond the dividing line of the Taurus Mountains—an event decisive in the fortunes of Christianity.

In one respect, indeed, Paul falls short of the high standard set by "that gentleman Jesus." Towards women his attitude would appear to have been frankly Oriental. He spared no pains in teaching his female converts to know their place, which was one of humble subordination, symbolized by the veil—a fact that has served as an encouragement in pious misogyny to some fifty generations of ecclesiastical sheikhs.

None the less, it must be conceded that Jesus and Paul had laid broad and deep the foundations of such an ideal of gentlemanly breeding as, before their time, had been hardly conceivable. Not only passive gentleness, but a spirit of creative love had been infused into the new organization and—lest it should grow cold—remained enshrined in its sacred writings. During the first centuries of the new faith, this spirit imparted to it an invincible strength—an army of martyrs went forth conquering, and to conquer, eventually, Rome itself.

Even so, there was still something lacking—the gentleman, as an integral product of European civilization, still delayed making his appearance. It is true that gentleness had come to be inseparable from any notion of Christian breeding; but was it quite so sure that this was the crown of strength, and not the last resort of weakness? Too much has perhaps been made of the servile taint in early Christianity—from an early date we have record of converts in the highest

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circles—but there is no doubt that it was to a very large extent a religion of the under dog, and as such stimulated a not inconsiderable reaction against the pride and joy of exuberant virility, that had been fostered by Pagan civilization.

Indeed when Christianity did finally become the state religion of the Empire, there seemed every prospect of its becoming infected with a vast corporate servility, and of its sinking to the level of a typical Oriental state cult—with its fringe of solitary ascetics and the veiled subjection of its women. For the Empire itself had gone Oriental, at the same time as it went Christian, and Constantine was the first of a line of orthodox Sultans—Byzantine and Muscovite Caesars . . . until the time was ripe for a tyranny more absolute and a faith more servile.

If that had been the fate of Christianity—to sink back into the East out of which it had arisen, it might have become a nursery of servile, but by no possibility of gentle, breeding. For that it was necessary for the spiritually bankrupt Empire to be put into liquidation, and a reconstruction effected with fresh blood, under Christian auspices.

What appeared to be the final catastrophe of the barbarian hordes flooding over the barriers and submerging the civilization of the West, brought about the very conjunction that was necessary if the new ideal was to be born. For the newcomers had in them, as the Romans never had, the making of gentlemen; and it was Christianity that gave them the power to realize these latent possibilities.

Your wild forester from the North may have been a poor benighted heathen, but he was a man of honour,

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a free man jealous of his freedom and, once he had pledged his loyalty, faithful to the death. That loyalty, moreover, be extended to his womenfolk; he was the loyal husband of one wife and—as the wily Roman discovered—there was no way of controlling him like that of holding a few of his women as hostages for his behaviour.

Gentle is the last word that anyone would think of applying to these men; there is even in their love an untameable quality, as of the forests and the sea. Where in all the poetry of passion is there anything of such overwhelming force as in the song of Brynhild's Hell-Ride! Woe indeed, is the lot of all men and women born in the world, "but," she cries—

"We two  
Hold together—  
I and Sigurd!"

Against this, Hell itself has no victory.

Such fierce and virgin loyalty is at the very core of what—for want of a better word—we must call the Nordic nature. The free man who had freely pledged his allegiance would scorn to forsake his lord, or even to survive him. Long after the coming of Christianity, that spirit persists—it inspires the thanes of Essex, who, when their Earl has fallen beneath a Viking axe, resolve to die where they stand around his body—all except one solitary Judas, who—pilloried to eternal shame—

The good man forsook,  
Who to him oft times  
Horses had given.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Freeman's version.

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It is the spirit that persists most clearly throughout the ages where the descendents of these tribesmen have remained least sophisticated by civilization, like those wild Scottish spearmen of Flodden, when, after the death of their King,

One by one they fell around him  
As the archers laid them low,  
Dying grimly, still unconquered,  
With their faces to the foe,

or these Swiss mountaineers, whose known loyalty made their very name synonymous with that of a royal body-guard; the men who, even when their King himself had turned tail, as happened in the French Revolution, laid down their lives to guard his deserted palace, and supremely faithful, obeyed his order to cease fire, that left them defenceless in the midst of a blood-maddened mob.

Nordic man had a sense of personal honour that rendered the slightest affront to his *amour-propre* a killing matter. Quite otherwise had been the honour of the Roman patrician, who might condemn his own son or cut down a man in the public street on suspicion of disloyalty to the State, but would never have dreamed of offering bodily combat to a private enemy. But to Goth or Viking, his own personality was the centre round which his world revolved; at all costs his individual value must be maintained without disparagement.

Let any man call him "nithing"—worthless—then, unless he wipe out the stain in blood, worthless he will be, and men will drive him forth from their fellowship as one unfit to live.

There is a story of a Danish King, who, having been taken prisoner by a brother monarch, was offered his

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life. That offer he rejected with contumely. Even if he should get back his kingdom and all his treasure—would that give him back his honour? Would that prevent posterity from saying that he had been taken by his enemy?

Such was the greatness of delicacy of barbarian self-respect. But individualists in arms, each fiercely jealous of his own honour, can hardly fail to acquire a habit of respecting each other's. Life has got to be carried on, even among men whose direst fear is that of dying in their beds. And unless you are minded to proceed to a combat *à outrance* with your neighbour every time you meet him, it behoves you, if not exactly to love, at least to honour him as yourself. Concede me my value, and I will concede yours—that is the iron rule of pre-Christian honour.

If not the flower, at least the roots of courtesy are there, struck deep into that wintry soil, and waiting for spring to come up out of the South. It is not only the mutual respect of armed freemen—there is the respect of the free man for the mistress of his household, his loaf-kneader or lady. There would have been no eating in hall among ladies for Sir Lancelot, unless, hundreds of years before he had ever been thought of, the lady had been a prominent figure in the hall which in primitive times served both as living and feasting room. It is just the difference between woman in hall and woman in harem, that marks the parting of the ways between West and East.

In the old English saga of Beowulf—which harks back to times when the English were still on the far side of the North Sea—we see, in the gracious figure of the Queen Waltheow, what woman in hall could be

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at her best. Mindful of courtesies, gold-adorned, she greeted her guests, presenting the cup to each, in due order of precedence, and bidding them be blithe at the beer-drinking<sup>1</sup>; after which she, the free-born queen, takes her seat of honour beside her lord at the feast.

Such is the best—perhaps an idealized best—type of Nordic lady; but there were others, to whom no one would ever have thought of applying the lovely term “peace weaver”; termagants and viragoes more than capable of standing up to any man—such, for instance, as Hallgerda, in the *Njal Sage*, reputed to be the most beautiful woman in Iceland, who, having in rapid succession succeeded in achieving two widowhoods, bestows her formidable charms on an inoffensive land-owner called Gunnar, whom she succeeds, by her incurable addiction to murder, in so embroiling with his neighbours that he gets outlawed and finally set upon, by overwhelming numbers, in his own hall. He holds them all at bay with his bow, until the string breaks, and he has to ask his wife to twist a plait of her lovely hair for a substitute. She enquires whether the matter is one of any special moment, and being told that his life is at stake, proceeds to remind him how he has once been indiscreet enough to slap her face—he can fend for himself now, without her assistance. Not, as it proves, for very long.

It may be that the blonde termagant, with her unbridled fierceness, in love as in hate, conforms more nearly to the primitive Nordic type than the like of the gracious Waltheow; but she was, at least, capable of making herself respected, and of enforcing a certain rough chivalry in her wooers. “He,” we read in a

<sup>1</sup> See the version by Wentworth Huyshe.



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collection of maxims attributed to Odin himself, "who would make himself beloved by a maiden, must entertain her with fine discourses, and offer her engaging presents; he must also incessantly praise her beauty. It requires good sense to be a skilful lover."

And not only to be a lover. For this same good sense, or sound business instinct, is a quality hardly less prized among these Nordic peoples than valour itself. They were the most uncompromising of realists—their utter freedom from sentimentality is a positively staggering feature of the Teutonic and Norse, as contrasted with the Celtic temperament. They will defy—or scrap—their gods with as good a will as they will turn the murder of a relative into a profitable, and peaceful, blood money transaction.

And it is a supreme proof of this practical common-sense that, on coming into the heritage of Roman civilization, they should promptly, and according to their lights, have set about the business of civilizing themselves, or rather, of reconstructing a civilization that had collapsed more through its own rottenness than any pressure that they had been able to apply from without. The one indisputably sound element of the structure appeared to be the spiritual fabric of Christianity. So on that they decided—with no more hesitation than that of sensible men considering any revolutionary departure—to start building.

The effect of that decision only concerns us here in one way. It made possible the ultimate completion of the gentleman. At last you have all the elements assembled, all the essential conditions fulfilled. You have a cult of gentleness, no longer pandering to the inferiority complex of a servile populace, but confirming

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the inborn virility of a people who, though ferocious and uncultured, have brought with them the tradition of freedom. Strength and meekness are met together; Christian charity has begun to leaven the tough lump of Nordic barbarism. That it will be a long and gradual process goes without saying; time and again it will seem as if Christian civilization were destined to reel back into the beast, the blond beast of those aboriginal forests, and be no more. And who shall say that that danger is even now past?

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"Of a graceful aspect and tall stature, affable in discourse and courteous in behaviour; and most bountiful as well to the ignoble as the noble; so that he was beloved by all men for his qualities of body and mind. . . . Among other virtues . . . if I may so express it, humility was the greatest."<sup>1</sup>

Here we have what I think is about the earliest record of a complete Christian gentleman, sprung from Nordic stock. He was only a petty king, of not much more than Yorkshire, and his importance consists, not in the little he did, but in the much that he was, and still more, in what he proved that a man could be—something quite inconceivable in the palmiest days of old Rome. For this King Oswin of Deira was not only a heroic fighter, but an obedient son of the Church, who accepted her faith in the spirit of a little child from the lips of one of her missionary bishops, Aidan by name. It is said that when Oswin was moved to mild protest at seeing one of his own royal gifts, a remarkably fine horse, passed on by the Bishop to a beggar, he was put to silence with,

"What, your Majesty! Is a mare's foal dearer to you than the son of God?"

Whereat the King fell at Aidan's feet and implored forgiveness. And the Bishop, having raised and con-

<sup>1</sup> From Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. Ch. 14. (Temple Classics' Version).

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soled him, remarked in a tearful aside to his priest, that so humble a king was too good for this world and would not live long.

Such holy and humble rulers can at best have been but rare and shining examples to their contemporaries. No doubt there was a spice of worldly wisdom in the Bishop's pessimistic and correct forecast of his pupil's early decease in so tough an age. But the revolutionary thing that has come to pass is that the Christian gentleman, when he appears, can be held up, by general consent, as a model for imitation; that humility and kindness have come to be regarded, no less than valour, as royal virtues.

Provided that the seeds of gentle breeding have been planted in good soil, it matters little how long the full blossoming is delayed. It is good enough that one or two early flowers should make their appearance as sureties for the future. It may well be that such premature flowering will have a beauty of its own that no summer glory is destined to surpass.

It is the darkest hour of Europe's dark age that produces the supreme and—one might almost add—flawless model of what Christianity can accomplish in the making of a gentleman. It is hardly necessary to say that the reference is to King Alfred—not the amateur cake-botcher of nursery legend, but the combined statesman, scholar and hero, who beyond doubt saved his own country from Pagan conquest, and—not inconceivably—Christian civilization from dissolving in chaos.

About him, it is difficult to write without the suspicion of fulsomeness. One feels that he would be a more popular subject for that latter day resurrection man,

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the biographical popularizer, if there were some colorable fault or weakness from which to work up the human interest. But he remains—after every scrap of available evidence has been examined—without giving the Devil's advocate even the beginning of a case. Here, if anywhere, is the Christian gentleman, *sans peur et sans reproche*; the man who, tried as few mortals have been, rose triumphantly to the height of every occasion, and yet retained throughout the sweet and unforced humility that renders so peculiarly appropriate his being styled England's Darling.

My own favourite episode in his career is that of his conduct towards Hasting, the great Viking chief whose horde he had fought to a peace, confirmed with oaths and hostages, and by the baptism, into the Christian faith, of Hasting's two boys. This lasted for just as long as it took to get away and come back with a greater horde than ever, and it was only after long, weary months of renewed campaigning that Alfred succeeded in storming the Danish base of operations, and capturing the whole of their fleet, their loot, and their families. "And Hasting's wife, and two sons," says the Saxon chronicler, "they brought to the King, who returned them to him, because one of them was his godson . . .," nor did he return them empty-handed, but with as many presents as at the christening itself. It probably never occurred to Alfred that he could have done otherwise.

As for Hasting, what that hard-bitten sinner thought about it can only be guessed; all we know for certain is that from that time, Alfred and England saw him no more.

Such uncompromising magnanimity as that which

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showers benefits on a treacherous foe, would only be degraded by calling it chivalrous—I do not see even the imaginary Sir Lancelot going to quite such a length. And yet this man was no unpractical dreamer, but one who, as far as we can judge, was successful in everything he undertook, at a time when a single error in judgment would have spelt irretrievable ruin. “Without wisdom,” as he himself writes, “no faculty can be fully brought out, for whatsoever is done unwisely can never be accounted as skill.” But this, that he had found, was a higher wisdom than that of petty calculation.

His humility, which is apparent in all his actions and writings, is that rare modesty of a gentle nature, without the least tincture of spiritual pride. He was one of the few rulers of genius whose highest ambition was, in his own words, “to live honourably while I was alive, and after my death to leave to them that should come after me my memory in good works.” To do faithfully his share of the task that lay to hand—neither more nor less; not to impose his will, but to fulfil what he could ascertain of God’s will.

When he codified the laws for his people, “I durst not,” he explains, “venture to set down in writing much of my own, for it was unknown to me what of it would please those who should come after us”; and when he seeks to create a vernacular culture by translating the classics, “he prays and beseeches every man that cared to read this book, to pray for him, and not to blame him if he understands it more rightly than he could. For every man must, according to his understanding and leisure, speak what he speaks, and do what he does.”

Perhaps, however, Alfred was too much of the man of genius to be the ideally perfect man of breeding, if we

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are to include the most literal sense of all. Like Paul of Tarsus he had his thorn in the flesh, the mysterious complaint that prostrated him at his wedding festivities, and added, from his twentieth to his forty-fifth years, to all his other struggles, that with chronic illness. He could master it in his own person, but he bequeathed tragedy to his line in the shape of a series of brilliant lives cut short.

But apart from this one, after all, problematical blemish, shall we not say that in Alfred, the perfect gentleman has arrived—so far as we can assign perfection to any human being? One could, without anxiety, pledge one's whole possessions to the first comer who could truly say—"In such and such an instance I can conceive of an imaginary Alfred displaying a nobler spirit or more beautiful manners than the one of history."

From which, it might be inferred that the age of chivalry has already dawned, and that the standard set by England's Darling will be the norm of gentlemanly behaviour for a steady increasing *élite* of subsequent generations from the 10th century onwards.

It is putting it very mildly to say that nothing remotely like this actually takes place. Indeed, the two centuries that follow Alfred's death are a time distinguished by an abundance of brute strength and courage in individuals, but in which gentleness would appear to have become an extinct quality, except perhaps here and there, and that not too frequently, among the ranks of professional Churchmen.

In the life and death struggle in which Alfred had borne so heroic a part, Christian civilization had saved itself by ceasing—almost—to be either civilized or Christian.

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The one chance of safety for the ordinary man, had come to be in the protection of any local tyrant or bully, with a castle more or less raid-proof, and a force of mailed cavalry capable of hitting back. And this was only to be bought at the price of abject and permanent subjection. Here in a nutshell is the origin of the feudal system—or feudal anarchy—that in its turn gave rise to the institution of knighthood and the ideal of chivalry or, as we might render it, “horsery.”

In these formative centuries, there was little enough romance about chivalry. The typical lord was an illiterate gang-leader of desperadoes, who, like himself, would stick at nothing. The type of adventurer who went to England with William the Conqueror, neither was, nor dreamed of being, in the remotest sense a gentleman. The whole thing was, to him, a dangerous speculation in land-grabbing, with as little sentiment about it as signing on with a pirate skipper. William’s posthumous nickname of Conquestator signified “the Getter,” and would equally have applied to any one of his followers.

These Getters or Grabbers, safely ensconced behind their bailey walls, and exploiting a conquered populace, were after all no worse than their fellow feudatories elsewhere in Europe. They were unabashed ruffians—“devils and wicked men” was what their victims called them—who were ready to go to any lengths of oppression, unless held in check by some stronger arm than their own. Ivo de Taillebois, who amused himself by setting hounds on his tenants’ cattle; Robert de Belesme, who tore out the eyes of a child hostage with his own hands; Geoffrey de Mandeville and his peers of King Stephen’s time, whose castles contained generously



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equipped torture chambers for the entertainment of any neighbour who might conceivably have been mean enough to furnish an imperfect return of his relievable goods—such were the knightly gentlemen of reality, for quite a number of generations after Alfred's death.

Are we then to conclude that the work of Alfred, and his like, in saving Europe from heathendom, had been done in vain, and the line of Christian gentlemen had died in his person? That would be to confuse success with quick returns. Nothing was in fact lost, so long as the continuity of civilization was not broken. If the plant is alive, it can abide the season of frost. The framework of organized Christianity, the high tradition of Rome—these remained, to these the barbarians had made formal surrender. The logical consequence of lip homage was bound to follow in due course, and principles, formally acknowledged, to be put into some sort of practice.

Strength, that is to say, running riot in anarchy, must sooner or later clothe itself with the gentleness to which Christianity had never abjured allegiance.

It was the Church that led the way by heroic efforts to put her own house in order, and constitute herself a spiritual empire, capable of imposing the discipline of her own ideals on the chaos of lay anarchy. For the thing of all others that anarchy cannot do, is to stabilize itself. Devils and wicked men, each competing against other in the style of a Darwinian nightmare, are too universal a nuisance to be tolerated indefinitely. It is a nuisance of which they themselves are bound to grow weary. The baron who built the castle may indeed have had all his attention taken up with looking for Viking sails in the offing, or the arrival of the winged

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hats, on comandeered horses, across country; but his great grandson, with nothing better to kill a bookless and almost comfortless time, than hunting and fighting his neighbours by daylight and surfeiting himself comatose after dark, must have had moments when he felt his existence somewhat lacking in colour, and even dignity. Man does not live by bread, or even blows, alone; least of all when he has been taught to regard himself as superior to the ordinary run of his fellows by reason of his gentle blood. Sooner or later—man being after all a noble creature—he will aspire to justify his superiority in his own eyes. Moreover the ceaseless suggestion applied by the Church will link this desire with one to save his soul from the concrete and dire penalties that await the unredeemed sinner.

Given the profession of Christianity; given the feudal baron at the head of his mailed knights, and the conditions are set for the evolution of chivalry—which is the same as to say, some standard of conduct appropriate to a Christian gentleman.

The first step in this progress is to find models for imitation. And where shall we look for these but in the past; those good old days that can so much more easily be fashioned to heart's desire than the stubborn present?

It will be remembered how, at Hastings, the first wave of the Norman attack was preceded by the strange figure, on horseback, of one who kept flinging up his sword and catching it, while he chanted a song—with which he must have known his audience to be already familiar—about Roland and Oliver, and the other vassals of the mighty Charlemagne who had died in Roncesvalles, as he, their singer, was about to die, plunging into the thick of the English battleaxes.

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The real Roland appears to have been a rear-guard commander of no outstanding importance, who fell into a trap set, not by infidels, but Christian mountaineers—the kind of annoying incident that will occur sometimes in the best regulated campaigns. But it was the imaginary Roland who made history, by the stimulus of his example not only as the ideally loyal vassal and comrade, but also as the champion of the Faith, at a time when the Church was about to appeal to this nascent sentiment of Christian chivalry as the driving force of a great counter-offensive against the infidel.

This was the first of a long series of what purported to be records of predeceased valour, but were really no more than dream pictures of an ideal chivalry, with the implied motto, to all whom it might concern, of "Go thou and do likewise." It started with a perfect crop of legends centering round the idealized figure of Charlemagne. Then, in the twelfth century, the centre of mythical gravity is transferred to the person of the British Arthur, whose strange fate it was to be resurrected first as a sort of fairy or wizard king, and then as the ideal and all-conquering ruler of a chivalrous Utopia, a happy hunting ground of marvellous adventures, with tournaments provided at every castle, and ravishing damsels waiting to be rescued at every turn in the usually enchanted forests that lie between. And then, as ideas of chivalry begin to expand, the Arthur myth attracts into its orbit numbers of others, such as that of Tristram, or sublimated adultery; of Parsifal-Galahad, or the saint in armour; and finally Lancelot, the latest and characteristically French creation of the gallant irresistible lover of every woman's daydream.

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There were many other patterns of chivalry, whose adventures, told at interminable length, were the stock in trade of every wandering minstrel—and it does make us realize what the depth of boredom must have been, on the long, draughty winter evenings, when the wind and fog found an entrance through windows innocent of glass, and the fumes of stagnant smoke mingled with the odours of decay from beneath the rushes, to think that the sing-song catalogue of adversaries overthrown and monsters slain, by such champions as Bevis of Southampton or Guy of Warwick, could be recited for hour after hour to audiences sufficiently enthralled to suspend the noisy brawls with which the gentleman of the party were accustomed to relieve their spirits every few minutes. But after all, it must have been a great deal more thrilling than the chronicles of unseen tennis matches, that keep presumably literate people of today glued indoors, through summer afternoons, to the neighbourhood of loud speakers.

It would be absurd to pretend that the effect of holding up these models for imitation was to raise the audiences to their own level of chivalry, or, as we should be more inclined to say of some earlier specimens, to their height of gratified blood-lust and lechery. But there was the constant suggestion that it is not only birth that makes a man noble, nor the spurs that make him knightly. And suggestion, though, like gravitation, it may be one of the feeblest forces in nature, yet if exerted constantly in one direction, may produce momentous effects.

The effect of that constant, if slight, pull, becomes very apparent in the course of three or four centuries. The first chivalry, both of romance and reality, is a

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very crude and barbaric affair. King William Rufus, a rather jolly, but quite unabashed blackguard, yet passed among his own contemporaries for a pattern of chivalry, on much the same principle as the most uncompromising young tough may become the adored idol of his schoolfellows, if he is also captain of both elevens.

The ideal of knightly perfection started, in fact, by being almost equivalent to one of knightly prowess. Almost, but not quite; for even thus early we may detect fits and starts of gentlemanly impulse in the most unlikely quarters. There is Rufus's waster brother Robert, from whom, when he was away on Crusade, their youngest brother, Henry, had filched his birth-right to the Crown of England. In due course, being at least a brave soldier, Robert brought over an expeditionary force from Normandy, with which he promptly swooped down on the capital, Winchester. But there, he learnt, was Henry's Queen, awaiting her confinement; on which he gallantly turned away, remarking that "he would be a villain who should besiege a lady in such a case." And yet it was this same Robert whose sense of humour had, on one occasion, led him to starve a number of captives, during the forty days of Lent.

The first decisive step forward was taken during the closing years of the Eleventh Century. For now the Church, as the climax of a long struggle—not always with too clean hands—to impose her spiritual Empire upon Christendom, brought off a masterstroke of inspired publicity, that should enlist all this crude valour, and launch it in a grand offensive of Cross against Crescent. It is significant that the scheme should

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have been sponsored by a French Pope on French soil—for it was in France, the “sweet France” of Roland, that chivalry had its birthplace. Significant too that the great Council of Clermont, at which the crusade was proclaimed, should at the same time have formulated a rule of Christian chivalry, which bound everyone of gentle birth, on attaining the age of twelve, to swear before the Bishop to defend the oppressed, the widow, and the orphan, and to devote special care to the women of his own class.<sup>1</sup>

To say that the marshalling of Catholic chivalry in the service of the Church forms a landmark in the evolution of the gentleman, may seem a grim joke to those who know what sort of a record these champions of Christianity actually had. Not only did they behave to the enemy, and to anyone, Christian or otherwise, who stood in their path, like the bloodthirsty barbarians that most of them were; but they undermined their own cause by perpetual quarrels and bad faith among themselves. And the Church itself had long ceased to be guided by the spirit of the Beatitudes; she had no idea of opposing the strength of her present foes, as she had that of her former persecutors, by an invincible meekness. The sword had now a cross to its hilt, and there seemed nothing incongruous in finding an Archbishop one of the doughtiest of Roland’s fighting comrades.

All of which is as good as to say that the way out of barbarism was long and hard, and that the Church was part of the very world she was attempting to reform. But so long as she maintained the continuity of her Christian tradition, her compromises with the spirit

<sup>1</sup> See *Chivalry*. Edited by E. Prestage, p. 9.

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of her time did no more than retard the infusion of that other spirit, whose fruit is gentleness, into the crude strength of primitive chivalry. The wonder is not that this was so long delayed, but that the first fruits at least were so soon yielded.

Even the first muddled, and worse than muddled, expedition to Jerusalem, brings to the fore, by sheer merit, the one of all its leaders fit to be called not only a Christian, but a gentleman; the selfless and humble Godfrey de Bouillon, he, who when offered the kingship of that precarious conquest, declined the title, while accepting the burden, on the ground that he would not wear a crown of gold where his Saviour had worn a crown of thorns. And yet Godfrey had evinced no more qualms than the rest of them, at the horrible massacre of the defenceless population, that had preceded the ecstatic prostration of the victors before the Holy Sepulchre.

It was a century and a half later, when the crusades were plainly a lost cause, that the Church was able to see her own notions of ideal chivalry embodied in the person of a crusading king, who was also a canonized saint—Louis IX of France. And for all time Saint Louis is likely to stand for a pattern of stainless and selfless virtue, according to the light that was in him; whose bearing, in captivity, compelled even the Saracens to respect him; and who was capable of inspiring a passionate devotion in those whose fortune it was to serve him. He was a pattern of those two cardinal virtues of a Christian, humility and charity; it was his regular practice to entertain, with his best fare, six score, and sometimes more, poor men, often waiting upon them with his own hands: a gentleman, too,

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in his manners—it is characteristic of him to have rebuked a knight for whispering at table.

And yet one would hesitate to say of Louis, as we would of Alfred, that humanly speaking he stands above criticism as the ideal gentleman of his age. One feels about him in the same way as one does about Marcus Aurelius, that there is something a shade self-conscious, and even priggish, about his virtue. He so often seems to be behaving by the book, and if that fails him, his intuition is not guaranteed to supply the deficiency. He becomes rather lovably ridiculous, when, by way of surprising his friends with really acceptable presents, he gives them hair shirts to mortify their flesh. But he is worse than ridiculous when he recommends laymen, who come across Jews and other mis-sayers of the Christian law, not to argue with them, but give them a thrust in the midriff as far in as the sword will go. Marcus, in reversed circumstances, would have recommended the arena.

Nor were the domestic manners of St. Louis quite free from blemish, even in the eyes of his adoring biographer, the Sire de Joinville, who seems to have been genuinely shocked at the way in which his hero made himself virtually a stranger to a wife in every way worthy of him, and to his children, who must have regarded their father, in the most literal sense, as a holy terror. As a modern commentator, Mr. F. T. Marzials, very pertinently remarks, it would have showed better manners if, when his ship seemed to be breaking up on a sandbank, St. Louis had gone to encourage his family, instead of remaining prostrate on the deck in front of the Host.

Moreover, if it be not blasphemous to say so, he does



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seem to have been fundamentally rather a stupid person—devoid not only of genius, but even of common-sense. His two crusades may have been magnificent, but they were hopeless in conception and muddled in execution—a dead loss to Christendom, and ruin to France.

But when every human deduction has been made that the most captious intelligence could suggest, how noble a piece of work this man is seen to be! To what an extent he does actually succeed in making his own life a combined mirror of Christian and knightly virtues; he is the ideally gallant warrior and leader, of the kind who thinks of himself and his own safety last, and is, as befits a saint, of a humble, meek, righteous, and merciful spirit, pure in heart and a peacemaker—"Leave other people's property alone," was what he said when his brother proposed taking the South Italian Norman Kingdom, "*il regno*"; capable too—which is saying much—of standing up even to his clergy on what he feels to be any plain issue of right and wrong. And how essentially lovable!

To take one typical episode of the kind that Joinville delights to record. That faithful servant has ventured to advise his master in council, in a sense more honest than courtly, At dinner, afterwards, His Majesty has preserved an ominous silence, and poor Joinville, feeling himself in disgrace with everybody, has betaken himself to a window in the royal bedchamber, against which he leans disconsolately, with his arms through the bars. Presently some one comes behind him and places his hands on his shoulders—an emerald ring on one of the fingers betrays the King, come to ask how so young a man can oppose his advice to that of all the

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greatest lords of France. And when Joinville desperately sticks to his point, the King tells him not to worry, he is thoroughly pleased with his advice, only—till the week is out—he is not to tell anyone. It is little intimate touches like this that make us acquainted with the real Louis—the Christian gentleman *par excellence* of the 13th century.

And how far we have travelled by then from the days when such as William Rufus could pass for the pink of chivalry!

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IT was the task of European chivalry to give form to that union of Pagan strength and Christian gentleness out of which it had arisen, and thus to develop into a school of manners—limited indeed in scope and often lacking in depth, but none the less of decisive importance in the making of a society fit for gentlemen to live in. The results of that training are summed up in the beautiful word *courtesy*, which of course denotes the standard of manners appropriate to the courts of kings or great feudatories, which naturally would take the lead in matters of breeding.

We shall be telling only part of the story if we make it a simple case of the more or less Christianized barbarian, the type that attains its perfect form in St. Louis, in whom the Christian has almost—though perhaps not quite—eliminated the barbarian. The manners even of Louis were not, as we have seen, quite up to the immaculate standard of his holiness; they might possibly have been improved had they been a little less holy. There are other influences to be taken into account, even thus early, if we are to understand so complex a product as chivalrous courtesy. And, unless we have been entirely off the path in our quest hitherto, it is safe to predict that the most important of such influences will turn out to be feminine. For if manners makyth man, it is woman that makyth manners, or—at anyrate—the best manners.

Now it is just in this way of chivalry that the civiliza-

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tion of the West takes the step forward, that gives it the lead of all others. It brings women into an equal and sometimes even a predominant partnership in the shaping of manners. It is by feminine arbitrament that fine questions of courtesy are decided, at least in those select circles where progress is most alive.

This is not to imply that anything like feminine emancipation, as we understand the word, was accomplished even in the most chivalrous society. On the contrary, an heiress formed a marketable and marriageable commodity, that was disposed of for purely business reasons by an overlord, or some equally unsympathetic parent. Moreover any rich virgin or widow was liable to be waylaid, imprisoned, or even—as was reported of William the Conqueror's Matilda—soundly thrashed, by any bold suitor for her hand and property!

There was thus no element or hope of romance in the institution of marriage under feudal auspices. So long as semi-barbarous conditions prevailed, that deficiency troubled no one; but now a new spirit was beginning to awaken, or an old one to revive a desire not only to live, but to get the best out of life that it could be made to yield. It was a spirit the reverse of Christian; for it was no water of eternal life after which it thirsted, but an earth-cooled vintage of the South, a Pagan draught

Tasting of Flora and the country-green,  
Dance and Provençal song and sunburnt mirth.

It would be far beyond our present scope to enquire why it happened that this spirit should have been first astir in the Southern France, the *Langue d'Oc* as it was

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then called. It was certainly partly due to the existence there of a number of flourishing courts, in comparatively peaceful circumstances, and perhaps also to contacts with the then flourishing Mahommedan civilization. In any case, we find an insatiable longing to impart colour and opulence to an existence that had grown as bleak as its own grey stone walls.

To the hot-blooded temperament of Aquitaine and Provence, this could only be effected by means of passionate love, cultivated as a fine art. But how was this possible, within the limits of an institution so incurably unromantic as marriage? By no manner of means—as the clear Latin intelligence fully perceived. Marriage was of the prose of life, love of its poetry—the two things were wholly different, and must be kept apart.

With an intransigence of logic truly French, this idea was put into action. A new relationship of lovers was established alongside that of spouses, and in entire independence of it. Ladies whose affections had been starved had now the opportunity of enjoying such worship as no husband ever dreamed of giving, of finding themselves valued for their sweet selves, and courted for their adorable beauty, by cavaliers whose sole business it was to specialize in all the refinements of love-making.

Troubadour was what these convenient beings were called; a word meaning poet, which was what ostensibly they were. But they were quite different from the wandering minstrels who went about from castle to castle, turning an honest penny by providing the evening's entertainment. They were recruited from every social class, from kings, like Richard Coeur de

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Lion, to the sons of serving men, like Bernard de Ventadour, whose noble patron, himself a troubadour, instructed him so well in the art, that his own lady was not proof against the pupil's blandishments. The average troubadour, however, would appear to have been an impecunious young man of good family or perhaps of merchant stock, with social rather than business ambitions—in any case one who could pay court to a lady on a footing of more or less social intimacy. If we want something like a modern parallel, though on a much lower level, we should be inclined to take the gigolos, or dancing companions, who thrive as genteel caterers for the unsatisfied, or insatiable longings—usually Platonic—of well-to-do young, and not quite so young, lady clients.

The troubadour, in fact, made it his whole business in life to be perfectly charming—and in the way most agreeable to the object of his adoration, who was also more likely than not to be maintaining him by gifts more tangible than that of her love. The technique of this agreeable profession was standardized in all its phases. There was a perfectly regular programme of advance from the most distant to the most intimate stage, and it had the advantage that a discreet lady would be able to hold it up at any selected point, or to slow down the tempo so as to prolong it indefinitely. It had, like the game of "courted, engaged, banns up, married," four degrees of love—first in distant reverence though not quite so distant as to elude observation; next as a humble and trembling suppliant; thirdly, as the formally accepted suitor and adorer; and, last stage of all—if that stage should indeed be reached—as lover with full appertaining privileges. Through all

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stages, the lover's first duty was to preserve strictest secrecy: none of the sins in the decalogue was accounted half so bad as that of kissing and telling.

It was all so much of a game, and played according to so elaborate a code of rules, that one is tempted to wonder how far, in the majority of cases, it really went. The very secrecy with which these affairs were conducted, leaves us guessing. What we do know is that husbands, as a whole, seem to have been surprisingly complacent about it. There were indeed, outbreaks of savage jealousy, like that of the nobleman who, having taken advantage of a hawking party to murder his wife's favourite troubadour, had his heart baked and served up to her at table; when she found out what her meal had consisted of, she vowed it should be her last, and jumped out of a window. But the fate of this over drastic lord was cited as an awful example—for his King deprived him of all his possessions, and caused him to end his days miserably in a dungeon. And for a husband to veto at anyrate the Platonic attentions of a troubadour, was to violate the social code in that gay, Southern atmosphere. As it was very reasonably pointed out—one's wife is one's property, and to praise that is, properly regarded, a compliment to oneself.

It was no doubt highly immoral thus to separate love from marriage, and to encourage ladies, who had dutifully allowed themselves to be forced into what was after all a business partnership, to enter into other relationships for—more or less—pure pleasure. But it did create a school—or perhaps we should say a forcing house—of gentle manners. The nicest points of courtly form were debated with as much subtlety

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as the great scholastic doctors of the time brought to bear on the problems of theology. We have what purport to be records of the proceedings in regular courts of love, presided over by this or that great lady, by whose judgment the issue was decided. But whether such courts had any formal or recognized existence is at least doubtful; like those of Charlemagne and Arthur, most of what we read about them comes from the fertile imagination of later romancers. There can however be no doubt that the conduct of a love affair was as meticulously regulated as the composition of a ballad, and that a delicacy of behaviour was expected from both ladies and gentlemen which, though it may have been no more than an elaborate artifice, must have wrought an almost unbelievable transformation in the amenities of daily intercourse.

But this joyous revival of civilization, in the courts of Southern France, was of too forced a growth to be lasting. The end came when the Church, which had no more than mildly frowned on the liberties taken with the Seventh Commandment, was roused to furious action by the infection of the district with heresy, and heresy of that worst of all kinds which seeks to enforce a standard of apostolic poverty on the clergy. There was a crusade of Christian against Christian, whose effect was to deprive the troubadours of their occupation, by involving most of their patrons in ruin.

"The genial and cultured society," we read, "of Provence and Languedoc sank rapidly into barbarism again, and there was no welcome anywhere for secular poets."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th edn.) art. Troubadours.



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But though the troubadours themselves gradually died out, their spirit was not so easily quenched. Its effect is seen in the later development of chivalry, which, to the Christian element that had tempered the force of its original barbarism, now added a finish and ornament of manners, that remind us of those exuberant architectural decorations that broke down the austerity of the earliest Gothic. For chivalry had also to pass through a decorative phase.

It would, of course, be absurd to expect that in real life we shall find every knight endowed with the standard of a Lancelot. Real life lags a long way behind romance, and this was never more the case than in the Middle Ages. But it was the fact that manners had become a prime object of a genteel education; it was not enough merely to vanquish opponents in the lists; courtesy "in hall among ladies" was equally required. In brief, a gentleman was unworthy of the name unless he had also the manners.

How carefully these were studied will be evident from the books of courtesy that figure so prominently in the literature of the later Middle Ages. In these the way of gentle breeding is mapped out from the tenderest years, and it is significant how continuously as time goes on, the emphasis comes to be shifted from the moral basis to the polished surface of life. Some of the things that it was considered necessary to set down, show what the unpolished surface was like. Spitting on or over the table at meals, picking one's nose or wiping it on the cloth, were among the habits to be discouraged in the best circles; as was passing one's hand over one's hair, as if feeling for a louse—an only too plausible explanation; helping oneself with

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one's fingers to joint or fish, or even fighting for the best morsel.

But these books, besides setting down such, after all, necessary precepts, contained others of a more advanced nature that are anything but out of date even today—not for instance to hang your head lumpishly down when spoken to, or to indulge in noisy laughter, or to tell any story calculated to harm or shame one of the company, or to interrupt somebody else's story, or to be quick to take offence. And besides this, the young idea had to be taught innumerable services and accomplishments of a more or less technical nature, from carving a joint to marshalling guests in exact order of precedence. So, in fact, to order one's behaviour that, as one of these excellent treatises puts it.

Men will thereafter say  
A gentleman was here today.<sup>1</sup>

Such training had its fruits in a courtesy that represents an enormous advance on the first days of chivalry. It was a showy and a slightly preposterous society in which so unscrupulous a personage as Edward III of England could pose as a second Arthur, with Round Table complete; but around that table were such knights as Sir John Chandos and Sir Walter Manny, and above all, the King's son, the Black Prince. We have only to compare men like these with such out-and-out ruffians as Rufus, or even with so thinly disguised a savage as Richard Coeur de Lion, to register the progress in breeding effected since the dawn of chivalry.

War was conducted by these paragons of knighthood—so far as their own class was concerned—according to

<sup>1</sup> Done into English by Edith Rickert, for the collection of such treatises in the Medieval Library entitled *The Babees' Book*.

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the rules and ceremonies of a gentlemanly game. Nothing could exceed the courtesy with which a captured opponent of knightly rank would be treated—others were liable to be knocked on the head without ceremony. Even the little operation of extracting a ransom could be rendered almost painless, by a unanimous refusal to stand out for rack-renting terms, and a willingness to accept the word of so honoured a guest as his bond for payment, without detaining his person. It is even reported that when the great Bertrand du Guesclin fell into the Black Prince's hands, the Princess herself, and several English knights, helped to ease things by handsomely subscribing towards his ransom, over whose terms, naturally stiff, he had disdained to bargain. There is, at anyrate, nothing incredible about the story.

And yet the best of these men could be guilty on occasion of unrestrained frightfulness. Even the Black Prince—a sick man, it is true, and carried on a litter—could order and supervise the indiscriminate massacre of the inhabitants of recaptured Limoges, and with difficulty be dissuaded from beheading its bishop; but when he saw three gentlemen valiantly defending their lives, he extended to them the clemency that he refused, otherwise, to man, woman and child.

The home and fountain-head of chivalry was France, which provided even its vocabulary—courtesy, romance, debonair, loyal, treason, and gave their driving impulse, as well as their name to the Crusades. The note of this French chivalry, and the same may be said of that of Spain and Germany—is, in spite of the low birth of some of the troubadours, almost exclusively aristocratic. Not only was it the blood that made the gentle-

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man, but also determined the scope of his manners. To people of another class he was of a superior species, and though he might—or again might not—treat them with the charity of a Christian, his courtesy and chivalry of a gentleman were not to be degraded to baser uses.

Now, though this would be true to a very large extent of the English aristocracy, it is, even thus early, significantly less than the whole truth. There was something in English nature, or circumstances, that barred the formation of a noblesse. If anything can be said to mark the parting of the ways, of Anglo Saxon and Continental civilization, it is when the younger sons of the nobility cut themselves loose from their order, and, along with the smaller landowners, amalgamated in the Chapter House at Westminster with the pursy burgesses of the towns, as His Majesty's Faithful Commons. We can understand with what scandalized horror John of Gaunt, son and father of Kings, greeted an attempt of this motley collection to assert itself.

"What," he exclaimed, "do these base and ignoble knights attempt!"

We must remember that the significance of Cressy and of Agincourt was that of the mail-clad noblesse of France, storming on in all their bravery and pride of chivalry, to utter overthrow at the hands of an army which might be described as that of the Faithful Commons, with an aristocratic nucleus, an army in which even a Prince of Wales would figure on the pay roll like the humblest—if there was such a thing as a humble—archer. One cannot help thinking that Shakespeare has got some of the spirit of that army, when he shows us Henry V going about the camp hobnobbing with

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such magnificently independent fellows as the soldier Williams, who will maintain his own quarrel against any gentleman in the service.

I have already spoken of Chaucer as having come out, in advance of his time, with the idea of its being not the blood but the spirit that makes the gentleman. I cannot refrain from coming back to him now, because he has created a type of gentleman not to be found in any of the chivalrous romances, one whose manners can adapt him, without the suggestion of patronage or loss of dignity, to the most mixed society it is possible to imagine. With the Knight in the Canterbury tales, the English gentleman takes distinctive form.

For imagine that company, riding along in the shadow of the North Downs and beguiling each other with their stories, and remember that it was imaginable, as the most likely and everyday occurrence, by the most realistic (when he chose to be) of poets. If I may be pardoned for quoting words of my own,

"Here we have an obviously realistic account of a state of affairs almost incredible to our age of rigid social distinctions. Imagine, to take as close a modern parallel as possible, a colonel in the life guards, a young squire, an Oxford undergraduate, a bank manager, a chef, the skipper of a tramp steamer, one or two artisans, a publican, a farm hand, the lady superintendent of a nursing home, and a vulgar old woman of the landlady class, all going together on the same journey, telling each other stories, putting up at the same public house, asking the landlord to act as governor and also as judge and reporter, and condemning anyone who is 'rebel to his judgment' to stand drinks all round."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The History of English Patriotism*, Vol. I, p. 80.

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It would be difficult to visualize Sir Lancelot, who for all his meekness and gentleness, was an aristocrat to the finger tips, mixing easily with such a company, or submitting himself to the judgment of so vulgar a person as the Host. But this is just what our English knight does, and when the lot for the first story is drawn by him (not without some slight suspicion of the host's manipulation):

He was wise and obedient

To keep his forward [agreement] by his free assent.

And yet as the pattern of a great gentleman he will bear comparison with Lancelot himself. We are told that from the time he first began to ride abroad, he had loved chivalry, truth, honour, freedom, and courtesy; that in martial combat he had always accounted for his man; that he was as discreet as he was worthy; that his bearing was as meek as that of a maid; that he had never in all his life spoken rudely to anyone whatever; that, in short,

He was a very parfit, gentil knight,

which, indeed, he makes us feel every time he opens his mouth to speak.

It is evident, too, that Dan Chaucer loved this creature of his imagination—if indeed he was not drawn from a living model—with something as near idolatry as he was capable of feeling; equally evident that he, the London vintner's son, had anything but an idolatrous regard for the sort of romantic chivalry of which he was among the supreme versifiers. It is the most surprising of all the uncannily realistic touches in the *Canterbury Tales*, that when he himself is called upon

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for his contribution, he plunges headlong into a rollicking and outrageous parody of the very sort of romance they were all, probably, straining their ears to hear. *The Rime of Sir Topas* differs from *Don Quixote* as a skit differs from a satire, and is as good as to say, "What humbug all this is!" So unmistakable is it to that very typical Englishman, the Host, that the company are having their legs pulled, and perhaps also, I would venture to suggest, that Chaucer is a Cockney upstart making fun of his social superiors, that he cuts short the recital in an honest, foul-mouthed explosion of temper.

But neither his creator, nor anyone else, ever thought Chaucer's Knight a humbug. For never did character ring more true than that of this new model of a gentleman, this man of manners—and manners of a scope and graciousness beyond that of the chivalric convention, even at its best.

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NEVER was there a more happily inspired conjunction than that of the words "light" and "leading." Sweetness and light—light and leading—when it is a question of character we can hardly resist either association. But then it is not the cold light of reason or the dry light of science that is in question, but a warm and gracious radiance of the sort that Shelley named intellectual beauty, and that diffuses itself not from the brain only, but the soul. It is in this sense that we would speak of the manners of the complete gentleman as enlightened, or—still better—radiant.

Now it is with this gift that the gentleman of Christian chivalry was least generously endowed. He was a man always of leading and often of sweetness—but only rarely of outshining light. One half suspects that even Sir Lancelot, if he had been introduced into one of the more brilliant salons of the eighteenth, or dinner tables of the nineteenth century, would have fallen a little short of social success, except in so far as his debonair presence would have taken hearts by storm, and silenced the critical judgment. As for St. Louis, all his holiness would hardly have prevented him from being a terrible bore in an atmosphere more sophisticated than that of his own age.

We shall therefore feel less inclined to regret the fact that after attaining its zenith of splendour, somewhere—say—in the first half of the fourteenth century, chivalry itself begins only too conspicuously to deterior-



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ate. It runs more and more to outward trappings and adornment, and is inspired less and less by the spirit of Christian gentleness. Indeed, as the Middle Ages draw to a close, the spirit of Christianity seems as if it were about to die out altogether, so worldly and so frankly pagan has even the Church become, not to speak of the laity. The crusading ardour is long burnt out, and when that bulwark of Christianity, Constantinople, at long last falls to the infidel, not even the Pope can induce the princes of Christendom to do anything serious about it.

But time and again Christianity has displayed its capacity of living on in a state of apparently suspended animation, and it is never more likely to be on the eve of one of its greatest periods, than when it seems as if it had at last outlived its day. Vital progress is rhythmical; it tends to fluctuate between one extreme and the other, compensating, as it were, for its own excesses. The tremendous spiritual force of the Northern Gothic had not been matched by a corresponding richness of intellect. And now that deficiency was being much more than redressed, by what had come to be the dominant influence on Western civilization, a self-conscious revival of pre-Christian, classical culture that, as one might have expected, was the product of Italy.

Here we are only concerned with the effects of this awakening on the shaping of a gentleman, and the gentlemanly ideal. It is evident that an utterly different state of affairs, with a corresponding difference of personality, has come into being from that in which the mail-clad crusader held the front of the stage. Neither then, nor ever, need we come to Italy looking for chivalry. It is a thing that commands neither the

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respect nor the sympathy of the Italian nature; just as Italy has never succeeded in understanding the rudiments of Gothic building. Light—intense, piercing light, flooding the blue Southern skies, and glittering on the reflected blue of the Mediterranean—that is the life of the Italian genius, that has no affinity with the mystery of Northern forests and the gloom of Northern skies.

It is only to be expected therefore that we should find an altogether new conception of manners and breeding obtaining in the colourful and exuberant social life of the Italian cities. Even the noblest of King Arthur's—or King Edward III's—knights, would have seemed more out of place than Romeo in the halls of the Capulets. The Italian of the Quattrocento, like an old-fashioned Chinese, displayed no more tendency to get emotionally excited about homicide in the mass than in the individual. War, like an occasional murder, was a necessary business, a destructive and dangerous nuisance to be mitigated as much as possible. Accordingly, when there was no other way of settling a disputed point between a couple of sovereignties, all that had to be done was to engage one of a few well known commander contractors, whose business it was to decide the matter in the field with the team chartered by the opposing side. All was done in the most picturesque and polite way, as we see it in those delightful toy battles on the canvases of Uccello. Nobody was very much hurt, except by accident—rival business men are not fools enough to engage in the mutual destruction of such expensive capital as trained soldiers.

That is an excellent way of indulging in war, without forfeiting the blessings of peace—at least, until the

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arrival of some bloody minded barbarian who refuses to keep the rules. But though you can contract for the most imposing martial statue of a commander contractor—on much the same principle as bookies and furniture men nowadays employ artists to create their desired personalities—you are not going to see visions and dream dreams about heroes whose motto is business first and safety a close second. You must perforce put your ideals, including the ideal of a gentleman, on a peace footing.

There is loss, no doubt, as well as gain, involved in the transition. Knightly valour, wedded to Christian gentleness, may be ill sacrificed to an increase of mental capacity. And Renaissance Italy had not only relegated physical courage to a much lower place in the scale of values, but it had also, for most purposes not purely decorative, eliminated Christianity from ordinary behaviour. A man was put into the world to get all he could out of it, in the way of enjoyment or personal advantage, and he pursued this end with the clearest consciousness of what he was about, and the most deliberate calculation of means. Take that most brilliant and charming company of both sexes who, as we read of them in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, put themselves into voluntary quarantine, and while the plague rages without, beguile their leisure with stories, of which the theme, endlessly varied, is that of love. But a love how different from that of the troubadours! Here there is no hopeless pining away, no nonsense about a passion too pure to crave fulfilment. These people are perfectly conscious of their passions, and take the shortest cut to their proper goal. A hot-blooded woman, a handsome young man, and the first opportunity . . . what

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can be more natural? And if there is a husband in the background, what can be more deliciously funny than the ruse that circumvents him? There is no need to diffuse a halo of romantic illusion about anything so transparently simple, and so delightful in itself. The less illusion we cultivate about life, the more clearly we shall see our way to enjoy it.

This attitude obviously implies a very different notion of gentle breeding from that of chivalry. The mail-clad knight was at once his lady's protector and hero, and, according to the convention, her humble worshipper. It was essentially a warlike society, in which the way to please a lady was to vault into the saddle and ride atilt at the nearest available enemy. But the cultured Italian gentleman was usually content to leave this sort of muscular exuberance to professional *condottieri*. He approached life not by way of combat, but of co-operation. Like that company in the *Decameron*, people met together in society for a common purpose of enjoyment, and whatever was best calculated to promote that end constituted good manners.

But however generously he might contribute, in company, to the common stock of satisfaction, it was always, to the true child of the Renaissance, with the mental reservation that his own interests came first, last, and all the time. The most delightful manners were a surface of thin ice, that might give way at any moment beneath those who glided so pleasantly over it. Of nearly all those who stood in the public eye, from the Vicar of Christ downwards, it would have been true to say that their words were smoother than oil, and yet were they very swords—if indeed the use of the word "sword"

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is adequate to a society in which every one of the arts was exquisitely cultivated, not excepting those of assassination, of poison, and of torture.

Nor must we forget that in their appetite for pleasure, these people were less of the epicures than gourmands. Rabelais knew the spirit of his time when he embodied it in the colossal gluttony, swilling and grossness of Gargantua. Even that most art-loving of all the Popes, the Leo X of Raphael, revelled in nothing so much as the coarse practical jokes that it was the custom to play on his fools, such as serving them with portions of monkey, or crow, exquisitely dressed, or shoving them under water in ditches under pretence of helping them out; and this is nothing to the reported spectacle of His Holiness Alexander VI, in company with his beautiful daughter, convulsed with laughter as he watches naked prostitutes scrambling for dainties on the floor of the Vatican. And when it comes to the attempted rape of a Bishop by a son of the celibate and Holy Father. . . .

What sort of a gentleman, we may well ask, is likely to emerge from all this? Or, indeed, what sort of gentleness? And yet, as we look back on it in the perspective of centuries, we can see that it was necessary for society to pass through such a stage in its education, in order to add something of intellect to what had, under Gothic auspices, been essentially a training of character. Whatever may be the sins—and they are legion—of the Renaissance man of breeding, he is, in any ordinary acceptance of the word, an indisputably more civilized product than the feudal baron, his predecessor. And Renaissance society, gross as it often seems by our modern standards, was incomparably more refined and

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better mannered than that of the old-fashioned baronial hall.

And we must remember that a society in process of evolution is rightly judged, not by its average, but by its most advanced products. And a society so creative, and so perpetually experimenting, as that of the Renaissance, is almost bound to give rise within itself to cells or miniature societies, in which manners are intensively cultivated, and attain a pitch of refinement that sets a new standard for the future. And for this, Italian conditions were ideally adapted. The country was divided into so many independent principalities, contained so many courts and ruling families, as jealous as rival beauties of each others' reputation for culture, that some highly significant advances could hardly fail to be recorded.

We need only mention the company of philosophers and humanists, the intellectual cream of their age, whom Lorenzo the Magnificent gathered round him in his villa overlooking Florence, and with whom he held converse in the capacity, not of patron, but of host and sympathetic friend, binding the whole group together in easy intimacy. Here the lovely garden, and the lovelier prospect spread beneath in the evening light, must have seemed symbolic of the new pleasures, of which the mind had become free by virtue of such intercourse.

But the classic portrait of Renaissance society at its best has been drawn for us by Baldassare Castiglione, of the little court of Urbino, in his book called *The Courtier*. Here we have a company, unlike the coterie of Lorenzo, of both sexes, who can pass whole nights in conversation so sparkling as to make them forget the

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passage of time, and to constitute a veritable textbook of manners in a society refined beyond the dreams of chivalry. It was a book that exercised an extraordinary influence far beyond the bounds of Italy. What had been achieved at Urbino could be reproduced elsewhere or at least imitated, and every gentleman of breeding now had models for his imitation, no longer in knights errant and mere tilting champions, but in such exquisitely civilized types as those represented by the soldier poet, Sir Frederick; by Julian, my Lord Magnifico, immortalized by Michelangelo as the Hero of the Medici Chapel; by the future Cardinal Bembo; and by the Lord Gaspar Pallavicin, who was very plainly the original of Shakespeare's Benedick, with the witty Lady Emilia Pia for his Beatrice.

Far beyond the Alps the influence of the Renaissance was diffused in lands to which its clear intellectuality was as alien as the Gothic impulse had been to Italy. But it was recognized on all hands that a new learning and a new style of life had arisen in the South, and that the superior man was he who could acquire as much as possible of both. The new spirit was frankly divorced from any sort of moral or religious aspiration. It sought after nothing beyond the glory and delight of the world; its motto was "do what you will." It found the old chivalry, now past its crusading prime, and transformed it to something more and more frankly decorative. In the sixteenth century we find its most admired type in the French King, Francis I, who had steeped himself as fervently in the lore of chivalrous heroics as Don Quixote, and was indeed, on the field of battle, the very quintessence of valorous knighthood, but was also a cunning, cruel, lecherous, faithless, and

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utterly unscrupulous egotist, whose word of honour bound him not a second longer than it suited his convenience, and who thought nothing of allying himself with Turkish pirates against The Emperor of Christendom.

During the transition period between the Middle and Modern Ages, a hasty survey might lead one almost to endorse without qualification that verdict of Raleigh's:

Tell men of high position  
Who manage the estate,  
Their purpose is ambition,  
Their practice only hate . . .

so seldom do we come across any character that one can respect for anything except cleverness.

There is no doubt, however, on that score. The intellectualization at least of the upper, and of the prosperous middle classes, goes forward with giant strides. If there is pure enthusiasm for nothing else, there is for learning. No other age—at anyrate in England—could have thrown up such a character as John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, a scholar himself and the generous patron of other scholars, an indefatigable collector and importer into England of ancient manuscripts; the importer, too, from Italy, of the gentle practice of impaling prisoners—though apparently after death—and known, during the Wars of the Roses, not without cause, as the Butcher of England. There is something peculiarly in keeping with the fantastic spirit of the time in his last, strange words to the headsman:

“Strike thrice,” he said, “in the name of the Trinity.”

There is that note of flamboyant extravagance about



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so many of the fine Renaissance gentlemen—even those that have gone down to posterity as monsters of evil. What romantic knight could have ended up more gallantly than Caesar Borgia, mounting his steed and galloping single-handed in pursuit of a whole army? Of sheer exuberance of knightly valour, there is no more fruitful time than that in which the very soul was being stamped out of Italy by armies of mercenary barbarians, who fought each other over her territory for her spoils, and introduced all the devilry associated with “the cruel warres of high Germanie.” But in these senseless and unproductive slaughterings we find such figures of knightly romance as Bernard Stuart d’Aubigny, “the flour of Chevelrie,” according to his countryman William Dunbar; as the young, the impetuous, and the ill-fated Gaston de Foix; and finally, as the Chevalier Bayard, “sans peur et sans reproche,” in whom, at least, there does linger on something of the high idealism of Godfrey and St. Louis, and who of all Renaissance warriors, comes nearest to meriting the name of a Christian gentleman.

But he is the almost solitary exception to the rule of every one for himself, and by any means. The fine manners and style of life are of the surface, the gentleness is seldom heart deep. And as we get further away from Italy, there is not the same lightness of touch, the candour that is almost innocence in wrong-doing; though we may acknowledge the perfectly developed Renaissance type in Richard III, who would no doubt have been highly amused at the attempts of his modern whitewashers to demonstrate his conformity to the most approved Sunday school standards. After all, if one’s nephew happens to endanger one’s tenure of a throne,

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that is sufficient reason for eliminating him. To tax one with omitting so obvious a precaution, is more of an insult to one's intelligence than a vindication of one's character. That is at least how I fancy it would have struck Richard. But then Richard was perhaps, even for his time, a rather exceptional Englishman, whom not even Shakespeare can refrain from providing with the determination to be a villain, which is the defensive reaction against an obstinately pricking conscience.

Henry VIII is a far more typically English character, with his inability to change a wife, or loot a monastery, without undergoing the most unspeakable moral convulsions, and emerging sanctified, in his own pious esteem, from the ordeal.

But by this time the inevitable swing back of the pendulum has begun from that uncompromising Southern worldliness so alien to the innate spirituality of the Northern peoples. The vast moral and spiritual upheaval has begun that is associated with the Protestant Reformation, but which also has its counterpart within what still remains of the Catholic fold. It was high time; for if the Italian influence—and it was a contemporary saying that Italianate Englishman meant devil incarnate—had finally conquered, the gentleman, in the sense we have used the word, would have been debarred from eventuating. Nor indeed was there much more scope for gentleness under the hard auspices of the Tudor Henrys, Manners had been intellectualized, but at the expense of the heart, and it was necessary to bring back the Christian spirit, in order to consummate that harmonious interplay of all the faculties that alone maketh man—or gentleman.

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We might reasonably expect that when we first encounter an indubitable gentleman in sixteenth century England, three conditions will be fulfilled. He will be a true intellectual product of the Pagan Renaissance; he will be fired by the dawning enthusiasm of what might best be described as the Christian Renaissance; and his gentleness, in an ungentle environment, will bring him to a bad end. Which description exactly fits Sir Thomas More, scholar, statesman, and canonized martyr. It may be that certain aspects of More's character may make us—or at least some of us—hesitate to accord him the title of complete gentleman, for it would be hard to couple that with the other title, in which More himself gloried, of *hereticis molestus*. But that is merely to say that in so ungentle an age, it is too much to expect the miracle of unqualified gentleness.

And yet—this one instance apart—how nearly he came to achieving it! There is about nearly everything recorded of him, a sweetness that is uniquely his own, like the scent of some rare flower. Its distinctive quality is that of an irrepressible and yet never barbed humour, that did not forsake him even on the scaffold. What could be more felicitously courteous than his reply to the Lieutenant of the Tower, who had made excuse for the hard treatment he was forced to accord to his distinguished prisoner:

“Master Lieutenant . . . you are my good friend indeed, and would as you say with your best cheer entertain me, for the which I most heartily thank you: and assure yourself, Master Lieutenant, I do not mislike my cheer, but whensoever I do, then thrust me out of your doors!”

Sir Thomas excelled in that virtue of Christian

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humility that is so vital to the making of a gentleman. It is said of him that whenever he got involved in an argument with one of the many learned men who resorted to his company, he would always turn it off by some humorous device in order to avoid any possible hurt to the other's self esteem. Of how many scholarly disputants would it be possible to say as much?

But More, we cannot help feeling, was gentle in advance of a time from which it might well have been thought that human or tender feeling of any sort had been eliminated. Henry VIII has found many defenders, but none who would go quite so far as to allude to him as "the gentle Henry." And yet it would be difficult to tax him with greater heartlessness than that which was the common form of his environment, a heartlessness which the first stirrings of the Reformation did nothing to mitigate. It was every man for himself, with a vengeance, when the loot of the Church, with its hospitals and charitable institutions, was being scrambled for by the nobility, Catholic as well as Protestant, to the accompaniment of incidental martyrdom, and in face of a public opinion, equally unshockable by the spectacle of queens on the scaffold, and of venerable abbots disembowelled alive in front of their own monastery gates. Perhaps the most revealing touch of all is afforded by the casual jottings in the diary of poor little Edward VI—an exceptionally nice boy, for his time—in which he notes the occasional execution of an uncle, more or less, as evidently all part of the day's work.

It is only when the new impulse of a Christian revival—whatever form it happens to take—has been

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at work for some time, that there can be any question of gentleness, and therefore of the gentleman in any but the formal sense of the word.

But at least the way is being made straight for his coming, in due season. The Renaissance was above all else a time of education, and of insatiable thirst for every kind of enlightenment. The intellectual work of civilization was going forward with an intensity positively feverish. Men, and women, were being crammed with all that the age could conceive of scholarship. Young ladies of rank were eloquent in half a dozen languages. Young gentlemen blossomed into poets and musicians. And however little depth there may have been beneath it, the surface of social life was becoming more and more brilliantly polished. Manners, if not gentle, were at least fine.

Moreover the first fruits of returning gentleness are already being garnered. Of Sir Thomas More I have already spoken, but hardly less remarkable, in his way, is Elyot—also Sir Thomas—who four years before More's death, had produced a little book called *The Governour*, which is a manual of training for "the child of a gentleman which is to have authority in a public weale," a description eminently applicable to those gentlemen of England who, in local as well as national affairs, were already beginning to assume the position of public functionaries.

Here we are unable to glance at more than one aspect of this extraordinarily enlightened treatise, namely its insistence on gentleness, not only in the teacher—a highly necessary qualification in those flagellomaniac days—but also in the pupil, the gentleman in the making. And to gentleness, says Elyot,

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are three special qualities—affability, placability, and mercy; from whence we pass to the sovereign virtue of mankind, humanity, which again is compact of three parts—benevolence, beneficence and liberality, which yet again, “maketh up the sovereign virtue of benignity or gentleness.”

“And therefore,” to quote one typical sentence, “the treasure of a gentle countenance, sweet answers, aid in adversity, not with money only, but also with study and diligent endeavour, can never be wasted.”

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QUEEN ELIZABETH'S was, as few human personalities have been, the centre about which her whole world revolved; a world of deliberate make-believe. Of all the many symbolic titles that were lavished upon her, none was more appropriate than of Faerie Queen. She was indeed the Queen of Fairyland, in a never ceasing masque or ballet, in which the dancers moved in coloured intricate patterns round her throne, bowing and offering love. For it was the most essential part of the show that every one of her subjects should be consumed by his love for Gloriana. It was as if one lady of old Provence had monopolized all the loves of all the troubadours. For it was according to the true troubadour convention that they languished and adored, and that one or two favoured ones were actually allowed to masquerade in penultimate role of *entendeur*, or recognized suitor.

It mattered not at all that the leading lady should be developing into an old lady. Personality and make-up were fully capable of maintaining the illusion with an enthusiastic audience. It was certainly a little awkward when—being like other actresses highly temperamental—she so far threw herself into the spirit of her part, as to fly into a tantrum and cry treason, whenever even the youngest member of the company was caught love-making off the stage. But they loved her too much not to tolerate her little ways.

That is what we have to understand about the

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Elizabethan atmosphere, and consequently about the Elizabethan lady and gentleman—this pantomine extravagance, this spirit of perpetual dressing up. It is what imparts to Elizabethan prose its gorgeous and often impenetrable luxuriance; it is manifest in a fashion of speech and writing that scorns to say the simplest thing except in the most complicated way; it is what makes it so difficult for the Elizabethan gallant to versify his passion, except in some such capacity as that of shepherd to shepherdess.

There are of course some conditions that positively compel directness. A long voyage in a small ship, on an uncharted ocean infested with enemies, is one of them—the sea dogs of the Spanish Main are no wasters of words; another is the discipline of translation from a simply expressed original; a third, the compulsion of intense feeling, as in the pleading directness of Shakespeare's greatest sonnets. Even Elizabeth, whose faculty for involved circumlocution puts that of Gladstone into the shade, can flare out on supreme occasion with her "Let tyrants fear!" or "I shall make you shorter by the head!" But in general, the spirit of her time is one in which the overblown paganism of the Renaissance is combined with a budding religiosity as in some fantastic bouquet.

It was above all of a vitality so rich and abounding as to be capable of inspiring even artifice. Elizabethan society was in headlong transition. The old order in church and state was dissolving. The ancient baronage, where it had not exterminated itself, was relegated to a back seat, and a parvenu aristocracy of adventurers, gorged with the proceeds of sacrilege, flaunted its new plumage in the light of Gloriana's beams. Instead of



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the old, grey-stone castles, there were springing up all over the country luxurious mansions, in warm, red brick, and designed in the form of the letter E—homes with no military, or other intent, than that of making the best of what life, backed by wealth, had to yield. And from those went forth an army of younger sons, without privilege or quarterings, into unknown lands and seas, on quests as bizarre as those of any knight of romance, or, it might even be, into plain trade as city apprentices.

The court itself exhibited this vitality in its rankest exuberance. There were, of course, scions of ancient houses still in their Sovereign's eye, but not enough to maintain an aristocratic tradition. All was new, experimental, and tinged with a certain vulgarity. Elizabeth herself, supreme arbitress of its elegances, would alternate between reeling off oaths like a trooper and Latin like a University orator; would take equal pleasure in being worshipped by her courtiers like a goddess, and greeted by her people in the street with cries of "How goes it, old whore!"

But the environment she commanded was one positively supercharged with its own sort of intellectuality. The court was fully conscious of its leadership of national culture. Some of the most highly reputed poets of the time were among its nobility, nearly all of whom were patrons of literature or the arts—it is with the company of the Earl of Leicester that Shakespeare is thought to have served his dramatic apprenticeship; and Leicester's intellect, like his character, touched about the lowest level of any. As was only fitting, under a mistress who excelled in every accomplishment, the court ladies yielded no point of superiority to the men,

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and how strenuous a business conversation must have been, we may guess from Shakespeare's earlier comedies with their ceaseless interchange of verbal passado, which like that of Tybalt, was fought by the book of arithmetic, in the sense of a studied and elaborate convention.

It is from such concourse of diverse elements that we must look for the making of that unique product, the Elizabethan gentleman. We say unique, because his like is not to be found in any other European country. Not, certainly, in France, where the gentleman is the scion of an exclusive aristocracy, fighting and loving at the same headlong tempo, and carrying its privilege of the duel to the verge of class suicide; still less in England's arch-enemy, Spain, with the grave and polished formality of its grandees, disguising a perfidy and ruthlessness notorious even in that age.

The Elizabethan gentleman differed from these more standardized types in being compounded of elements as diverse as the society in which he moved. Certainly he was far from being incapable of ferocity—the record of the English in Ireland, not to speak of on the high seas, affords enough proof of that. But he seldom specialized in those super-subtle refinements of cruelty or deceit that were the speciality of the Renaissance. And he could rise, at his best, to a high level of Christian gentleness.

It is fair to judge of an ideal by its noblest embodiment. There was no doubt who was recognized as constituting the *ne plus ultra* of breeding, the complete gentleman of his time. To whom could such a description be held to apply, but to:

That immortal spirit, which was deckt  
With all the dowries of celestial grace?

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to whom but to that Sir Philip Sidney, "glory of the field and glory of the Muses," "that marvellous youth," whom in the words of John Addington Symonds, "all classes concurred in worshipping . . . who displayed the choicest gifts of chivalry and scholarship, of bravery and prudence, of creative and deliberative genius, in the consummate harmony of a noble character"<sup>1</sup>?

It is such unmeasured praise that innumerable writers of his own and subsequent days have united in lavishing upon Sidney. It appears strangely disproportionate to anything he actually achieved, either with the sword or the pen—his principal feat of arms was to get himself killed, and apart from a few lovely sonnets, his writings are more written about than read—he would be an heroic reader who could hold his course from cover to cover of *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*.

There appears in fact, both in his life and writings, seen through our modern eyes, that element of unreality, or deliberate make-believe, so characteristic of his time. Arcadia is too genteel a countryside to be credible, or even very interesting; the long series of sonnets, interspersed with songs, to Penelope Rich, or Stella, no more succeeded in convincing us that his heart is in the affair, than, apparently, he can have succeeded in convincing the lady, for neither before nor after her marriage to another, and immeasurably inferior, swain, not even when he importuned her, in lines that do at least have a ring of sincerity, to a discreet venture in adultery, was she minded to be more than a sister to him; though capable, as she proved, of being

<sup>1</sup> Sidney, p. 2.

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very much more than a sister, to the right lover, when he came along in the person of Sir Charles Blount.

But Sidney's passion is no more than a charming masquerade, with himself in the role of a belated troubadour, content, even so, to remain at the stage of humble *precador*, all of whose advances are checked by the same "No, no, no, no, my dear, let be!" and who in his heart of hearts, is pleased to leave it at that.

In the whole of Sidney's brief and dazzling career, there is seldom a time when we can be sure that he is appearing in his own proper person, and not in some part of romantic knighthood in which he has chosen to take the stage. He is, in fact, a Don Quixote who carries it off so nobly as to get himself accepted at his own valuation. He writes to Stella of his prowess in the lists, as if he were a veritable Lancelot or Tristram. And when he tries to keep up the illusion amid the grim work of war, his life proves to be the forfeit.

That concluding scene shows the Elizabethan gentleman at his brightest and weakest. For a British expeditionary force was committed to an operation of vital importance against one of the most consummate strategists of all time, the Duke of Parma, who was engaged in the prosaic business of throwing a convoy of provisions into a besieged fortress, and had taken the equally prosaic precaution of providing it with a sufficiently strong escort. Into this escort through morning mist charged a handful of English horse, which included the flower of the young nobility, in a pure spirit of knight errantry, hacking their way unprofitably through anything up to ten times their numbers, and performing feats of incredible valour, while the convoy rumbled peacefully on its way. Even so, Sidney would

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probably have come out of it scatheless, had he not perceived that one of his fellow gallants was without thigh armour, and accordingly out-Quixoting Quixote, divested himself of his own. It was just in that denuded area that an unchivalrous lump of lead found a lodgement.

About the ensuing famous incident of his resigning his cup of water to a dying soldier, there is one touch, not usually noticed, of characteristic Elizabethan *panache*. For when the soldier had finished his drink, Sir Philip, still managing to keep in the saddle, though he must have been nearly fainting from his wound, pledged the poor fellow's health with what was left.

As was said of a later very similar cavalry charge, all this was magnificent, but it was not war—it would have been more properly described as keeping up the masquerade of the Elizabethan court life by playing at soldiers. But what a grand game it was! and how they did throw themselves into the spirit of it—Lord Essex tossing his hat into the sea from sheer excitement, as he went into action against the forts of Cadiz, and Sir Walter Raleigh replying to each salvo of their artillery with a flourish of trumpets! But—except when the supreme crisis of the Armada pulled them together—it was the veriest caricature of the real thing.

Chesterton has somewhere contrasted the medieval with the Elizabethan spirit, by playing upon the difference of the names Breakspear—that of the one English pope—and Shakespeare. To the like of Essex and Sidney, it would really seem to have afforded greater joy to shake one's own spear with a superb flourish, than to break that of one's enemy. It is certainly the impression that we get from the sort of

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fighters that the early Shakespeare and his contemporaries put on the boards with their flaunting bombast:

And from thy burgonet I'll rend thy bear!

or

Tut, they are peasants; I am Duke of Guise!  
And princes with their looks engender fear.

The whole of the *Faerie Queen* might be described, in this sense, as a prolonged flourish of spears!

This swagger of the Elizabethans was no tinsel substitute for valour, but sheer excess of vitality. These men were brave, to the point of recklessness, but on their lips bravery had more than a martial significance; theirs was the bravery of spring flowers, and of sunlight on waves, and of a woman's rich attire. They were brave, as nature herself is brave, and like her, prodigal of their bravery, wasting their substance in riotous living.

But bravery, even in the most extended significance, is only the foundation of a gentleman; until it is confirmed in gentleness, there is no completion. This is just where the Christian element in the Elizabethan nature begins to count. To come back to Sidney; his gallantry, his scholarship, his fine manners, all about him that is brilliant, or fantastic, or picturesque—these might have been imported straight from Renaissance Italy, at its most pagan. But that is not what most endears him to us, or did to his contemporaries; but rather the element in his composition that moved Shelley to sum him up in a line, as

Sublimely mild, a spirit without spot.

A little too sweeping, that, for Sidney, who like

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practically every man of his time, had a quick and fiery temper that proved capable of marring his manners upon at least one recorded occasion. But spirits without spot, if they existed, would not be sufficiently human to come within the scope of mortal affections, and Sir Philip's one or two human weaknesses probably only served to enhance the affection that was everywhere lavished upon him. Of him as much as any man would it be true to say that from his Sovereign, who would speak of him as "My Philip," downwards, all were proud of him, all loved him. The soldiers adored him—and no wonder; prominent men all over Europe were eager to correspond with him; books were dedicated to him in remote universities; artists, authors, musicians, engineers, competed for his sympathy.

"Gentle Sir Philip Sidney," laments Nash, poet and satirist, "thou knewest what belonged to a scholar . . . well couldst thou give every virtue his encouragement, every art his due, cause none more virtuous, witty, or learned, than thyself."

Gentle Sir Philip! It is thus that we prefer to think of him, and in a wider sense than the mere herald's significance. Even now his memory retains some of the sweetness that captivated all around him. Nor can we help attributing it, at least in part, to the fact of his being not only a scholar but a Christian. There is no more inspired sonnet in the whole of the *Stella* series than that with which it concludes, commencing:

Leave me, o love, that reachest but to dust;  
And thou, my mind, aspire to higher things!

There was no doubt a certain element of Elizabethan flourish about even this Christianity, but we must

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remember that, with the menace from Spain and the Counter Reformation overshadowing everything they held dear, Sidney and his contemporaries could hardly have been the patriots they were, without being equally enthusiastic about their sorely menaced faith.

It was a faith that had not yet acquired, like the beasts in Revelation, eyes to turn within as well as without. Such a thing as an Elizabethan mystic, of the State cult, would have been almost inconceivable. Puritanism itself had hardly yet taken on its terrible self-searching, and intransigent austerity. And yet religion could and did play its part, as it never did during the earlier Renaissance, in shaping men's lives.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in Spenser's vast, uncompleted poetical allegory of the *Faerie Queen*. Its purpose, as the author himself explained in a letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, was "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous or gentle discipline." The muse had become moral, and the gentleman was expected to constitute himself a meeting place for all the virtues, the chief of them being holiness, as embodied in the Red Cross Knight. The perfect gentleman of Spenser's ideal was the as yet uncrowned King Arthur, who, in addition to holiness, was to be the pattern of temperance, chastity, friendship, justice, courtesy and constancy, with five other virtues which Spenser never even got to the stage of naming. Just such a gentleman, in fact, as Spenser had loved and admired in Sidney, such a figure of a gentleman as Sir Philip had actually cut in the eyes of all his contemporaries.

We have just that same feeling of watching a beautiful masquerade, as we have when we follow Sidney's own career. There is none of that intense concentration



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of vision, that makes us as familiar with the way of the Pilgrim's Progress, as of our own from the door to the station platform every morning. Never for a moment have we the remotest illusion of Britomart or Florimel Guyon or Calidore, being real flesh and blood, like Mr. Greatheart or Lord Chief Justice Hategood. Though the sheer spell of its beauty, both of description and music, may hold us entranced, it is like the enchantment of some lovely dream, which we know is a dream, while we screw our eyes to prevent ourselves from waking. But I doubt whether the most loyal Spenserian has ever succeeded in holding fast to the thread of the story, or, if he tried to do so, that he might not find that he was grasping that of a cobweb.

This dream, this unsubstantial pageant of life, this stage on which all men and women are the players and on which a privileged few are trained, "in virtuous and gentle discipline," for the leading parts—does not that notion embody the very spirit of the Elizabethan age? Did not its greatest spirit of all bequeath, as the last word of all his wisdom:

We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on?

But if the gentle life is, even with such as Sidney, partly a pose, it is a pose as lovely as that of the Olympian Hermes. It is above all an education, as at school they encourage the pupils to perform in the high roles of classical drama. And in life, not even the actor can say where the pose ends, and the reality begins.

The Elizabethan scene, like its greatest poem, is such that we might well despair of finding any ideal thread to guide us through its labyrinth. There is such a clash

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of contradictory motives and morals, that it would appear that the age was only constant in its flaming inconsistency. Our great sea dogs—posterity is still uncertain as to whether to treat them as patriots, or pirates; or both at once. What are we to make of even Sir Francis Drake, in the supreme crisis of the Armada, falling out of the line in order to engage in a bit of private looting? What of such a splendid creature as Essex, who seemed destined to take Sidney's place as the acknowledged flower of chivalry, and yet so signally belied all that promise by his downfall as waster, bungler, and grown-up spoilt child? What of Elizabeth herself? What was the reality behind that bewildering complex of posturings and subterfuges, those endless changes of mood and gesture? Was there a heroine beneath the make up, or a villainess? Or was it all make up, and no woman at all? Posterity is left disputing.

And the Elizabethan gentleman? Is there any consistency about him at all? Any ideal pattern to which he aspires to conform? Are we to conclude that his gentleness, and his very religion, are like an eighteenth century sham castle, façade and nothing behind.

To conclude that, would be to proclaim our own superficiality. For Sidney and Spenser themselves are witnesses to the existence of what might be truly described as a hunger and thirst after gentleness. Even poor, misguided Essex longed to be thought of as the perfect, gentle knight, and the most attractive feature of his career was a humanity to civilians, in captured Cadiz, that won him the amazed admiration of the Spaniards themselves. It is not without its significance that there should have been no greater Elizabethan compliment than to join anyone's name to the adjective

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"sweet." And this comes nearest to expressing what we feel to be especially distinctive of the Elizabethan spirit. Most of all is it appropriate to the "linked sweetness long drawn out" of its music. Musical history may tell of greater periods, but assuredly of none more sweet.

It is just this note of sweetness we miss in the clear, joyous paganism of the Italian Renaissance. Perhaps it goes best with a certain softness of outline congenial to a Northern atmosphere. It breathes a tender infinite compassion, such as rises with the mist of still October afternoons, at the thought of beauty doomed and love's labour lost. It is the note that sounds in:

King Pandion, he is dead,  
All thy friends are lapped in lead,  
All thy fellow birds do sing  
Careless of thy sorrowing. . . .

It can wring out of even blood and thunder supermen like Kit Marlowe such heartbreaking pathos as that of Dr. Faustus's last hour:

See where Christ's blood streams through the firmament!  
One little drop will save me—o my Christ!  
Rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!

It is such susceptibility to pity, such sense of the pathos in mortal things, that is the first step to gentleness.

This we shall find developed to the highest pitch in Shakespeare. It would be hardly too much to speak of it as his religion. For to religion in the sense of godliness, Shakespeare's reaction would seem to have been an almost blank negative. He could play upon all the stops of human character except that of holiness; could

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pluck the heart out of any man's mystery except that of a saint. To him there would seem to have been no distinction between loving God and loving my neighbour.

It was a love truly godlike—all-embracing, all-comprehending, all-forgiving, all-pitiful. That is the one, unvarying theme that with endless variations, sounds through everything he wrote: "The pity of it, Iago, O, Iago, the pity of it!" that is surely the authentic voice of the Maker himself bursting from the heart of his creature. Pity striding the blast like the naked new-born babe, the quality of mercy dropping like rain from heaven, the milk of human kindness—one could go on multiplying instances without end. It is, to put it in Wagnerian terms, his motive. It even informs us, beyond all possibility of doubt, when he has arrived. For that crude melodramatic repository of horrors called *Titus Andronicus*, is one in which Shakespeare is believed to have had a hand, though a small one. We run our eyes over the various scenes, with perhaps a certain relief to find that the Elizabethan output of dramatic tripe could rival that of the Victorian Surrey Side, or present day Hollywood; when suddenly—in Act 4—a fly having been added to the staggering list of things killed on the stage, there follow these lines:

But how if that fly had a father and mother,  
How would he hang his slender golden wings,  
And buzz lamenting doings in the air!  
Poor harmless fly!  
That with his pretty, buzzing melody,  
Came here to make us merry, and thou hast killed him!

The music, the sentiment, the soul of it are unmistakable! We are in the presence of Shakespeare.

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His works are a Bible of gentleness. Men like Ben Jonson and Milton did not choose their epithets at random; to the one, who knew and loved him, he is "gentle Shakespeare," "my gentle Shakespeare"; to the other, born too late to remember him living, "sweetest Shakespeare." Sweet and gentle—these are the adjectives that cling to him.

As with Spenser, there could have been no question of his qualifying for gentility in the old, or formal sense. But in the making of the English gentleman he probably played a more effective part than any other human being, for, like that of the Authorized Version, his influence was all-pervading, and some portion of his spirit passed into the nation's.

Like every supreme genius, he gave voice to something that was struggling for expression in the world around him. He focussed all that was latent or nascent of gentleness in the spirit of his fellow Elizabethans, and embodied it, not in a dream world of chivalrous make-believe, like that of the Faerie Queen, but in characters more vividly convincing than those of life itself.

I do not say that he aimed at providing a portrait gallery of model gentlemen. That was no more his way than it was to create heroes. We must look for no Sir Lancelot or Prince Arthur on his stage; no predecessor of Sir Charles Grandison. He has too understanding a sympathy with human weakness ever to depict humanity without it. His ideal gentleman, if he can be said to exist, is broken up into fragments, like a human sacrifice, and divided among many. Some part of that ideal has gone into Henry V, if we can forget the far from gentlemanly young man out of

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whom His Majesty has developed, and also one or two little episodes like the order to kill his prisoners. A more lovable recipient is Brutus, who claims, with obvious truth, that he has never in his whole life found a man who has not been true to him—and yet, can we call the murder of Caesar, even as Shakespeare describes it, the expedient of a gentleman? Horatio—perhaps, as far as he goes—but a *great* gentleman? I, for one should be inclined to say that some modicum of grace had descended upon Sir John Falstaff. But that, even if it could be proved, would involve too long an argument for our present purpose. And Sir John would have waxed apoplectic at the idea of his being a model of a gentleman, or anything else, except a consumer of sack.

## CHAPTER 8

### *CAVALIER*

EVEN before the great Queen had taken her leave, the Elizabethan masquerade had begun to pall. In the last years of her life she had become an anachronism.

A new generation had arisen that had no part in the spirit of the Renaissance; she was a discarded symbol, a lonely old woman who had outlived not only her lovers, but the love of her people. And with her the typical gentleman of her age, the courtier-adventurer, with his fantastic speech and extravagant artifice of manner, had likewise passed out of mode. Life under the early Stuarts had fallen beneath the shadow of a great seriousness; men were too much in earnest about their causes and beliefs to indulge in make-believe. It was a road at the end of which the red light of war might have been plainly discerned. For a fundamental cleavage of principle had begun to reveal itself, that no argument could bridge, and that would compel every man to make his choice of one side or the other.

To the Elizabethan gentleman, no such compulsion had presented itself. He could cheerfully combine the faith of the extreme left with the politics of the extreme right, and all within the bosom of the Anglican fold. He had been borne too fast along the stream of life to steer by the compass of abstract principle.

But now the stream itself was divided, and it was a choice between committing one's barque to the dark and whirling spate of Puritan intransigence, or guiding her into some calm reach or backwater of conservatism.

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That was the real significance of the opposition between Roundhead and Cavalier. And the result of it, after twenty years, was to draw from that cynical, but shrewdest of judges, Charles II, the verdict that dissent was no religion for a gentleman. And by that time, there were few of the upper class who would not have endorsed it.

The word cavalier has come to be associated so inevitably in our minds with the type of gentleman who flourished during the reign of Charles I, that it is difficult for us nowadays to realize that up to the very eve of the Civil War, a country mansion would quite as likely as not have housed an owner of militant Puritan leanings. But the alliance of gentle breeding with godly discipline was too unnatural to last. The high Puritan Fathers would have been the first to disown it. Grace, not manners, saveth man; there is only one Blood capable of ennobling him. It was all or nothing—be holy, and let who will be gentle. For in the holiness of the Puritan, gentleness had no part. The Lord his God was older than charity.

And that, as the second Charles divined quite correctly, from the standpoint of his worldly generation, was no religion for a gentleman, however much it may, or may not, have been adapted for the making of a saint. The English squire or nobleman, whatever he may think himself in the excitement of the moment, is no radical, to pursue a logical idea to its conclusion. However stimulating an effect the new wine may, at the first draught, have on his palate, sooner or later he will be brought to confess that the old is better.

That is implicit in the very meaning of cavalier. It takes us back to the primal idea of chivalry, that of the



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armed horseman. For the real Great Rebellion was not—as we have been brought up to believe—that of people against King, but of all that is most instinctive and traditional in the English nature, against a breach of its own continuity. Talk to your genuine Englishman of making all things new, and you will drive him to take refuge in recovering as much as he can imagine of things old.

It is the cavalier spirit that rebels against the urge, not only in England, but all Protestant communities, to complete the work of the Reformation, and sweep forward from the Pagan Renaissance to the new Kingdom of Christ on Earth; the cavalier desire is to get back behind the Renaissance, to the faith and chivalry of an idealized past, without forfeiting the benefits that the Renaissance has brought in its train, in the shape of the new learning and heightened amenities of civilization.

Grant that the cavalier was a sentimentalist at heart, grant him to have lacked any consistently thought out philosophy, and you are merely emphasizing the strength and weakness of his English nature. The strength, because it has always been the Englishman's way to repose on a deeper wisdom than that of his mind's conscious surface; the weakness, because it so often leads him into the pursuit of ideals fundamentally incompatible. And that is why we find among the spiritual and intellectual cream of the cavaliers, some who were so torn asunder between irreconcilable desires that they could find no refuge but in the grave.

There was that very gallant gentleman, Sir Edmund Verney, the King's standard bearer at Edgehill, who, though he was of strong Puritan leanings, and though

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his own eldest son was fighting in the enemy ranks, followed his master in the true spirit of chivalry, swearing that he who wrested the standard from his hand must first wrest the soul from his body. But it was with heavy heart and a troubled conscience; and we find him, a few days before the battle, coming in a state of the utmost dejection to his friend Hyde, afterwards Lord Clarendon.

"My condition," he said, "is very much worse than yours . . . you have satisfaction in your conscience that you are in the right . . . but for my part, I do not like the quarrel, and do heartily wish that the King would yield and consent to what they desire; so that my conscience is only concerned in honour and gratitude to follow my master. I have eaten his bread, and served him near thirty years, and will not do so base a thing as to forsake him; and choose rather to lose my life (which I am sure I shall do) to preserve and defend those things which are against my conscience to preserve and defend."

After the battle his body was never recovered—only his hand was found, still clasped round the fallen pole of the standard.

Lord Falkland was another case of a liberal-minded cavalier to whom the conflict of principles had become intolerable. He was one of those who seem born to illuminate and adorn any society to which they may belong. Without being more than an accomplished amateur in scholarship and letters, he made his house, at Great Tew, the rendezvous to which all the leading intellectual lights of Oxford, a dozen miles away, were wont to resort. He himself was the most delightful and stimulating of hosts, "his gentleness and affability,"

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according to Clarendon, being "so transcendant and obliging, that it drew reverence and some kind of compliance from the roughest and most unpolished and stubborn constitutions, and made them of another temper in his presence than they were in other places."

This undersized, ungainly man, with his unpleasing voice, and "black hair, something flaggy," would seem to have radiated a charm that was not only joyous, but positively creative. Under his auspices, the English country-house proved capable of fulfilling a similar function, as a nursery of genius, to that of Lorenzo de Medici's villa overlooking Florence. It was no accident that Chillingworth, almost the only one of all the religious disputants of that time whose ideas have permanent value, should have composed his masterpiece under Falkland's roof.

And yet the outbreak of the Civil War wrought a deadly cleavage in Falkland's own mind. Who is there that is not acquainted with the famous description of how, "sitting amongst his friends often after a deep silence and frequent sighs, he would with a shrill and sad accent ingermine the word, Peace, Peace——." But for him there was no way out, except that of virtual suicide. And so he rode up to a hedge, lined with musketeers, with no other purpose except that of getting himself shot out of existence.

It was just because men like Verney and Falkland were possessed of exceptional insight, that they were able to realize the hopelessness of putting the wine of the new intellectual ferment into the bottles of a past age. Because the logic of revolutionary godliness was too much, it did not follow that the old simple faith and loyalty were enough. Loyalty to what end? Faith

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in what principle? Such things might not bear thinking out.

But to the average gentleman, who was not in the habit of driving thought to conclusions, such difficulties were less likely to present themselves. He was content to take life as it came, without bothering too much about consistency. His affections were rooted in the merry and traditional England that the new gloom threatened to engulf. The fact that he had gone up to Westminster to vote against the new-fangled bureaucracy and high-churchmanship, did not prevent him from rallying to the Royal Standard when it was unfurled against rebellion. Or else he prided himself on continuing a good Parliament man, and standing like King John's baronage, for the time-honoured liberties and laws. If so the logic of subsequent events convinced him, in all but a few isolated cases, that he had backed the wrong horse. It took a very few years reign of the saints and major-generals to make gentleman and cavalier practically equivalent terms. But by that time the cavalier spirit itself had suffered a change that made the very word an anachronism.

The fact that the cavalier cause was at a fatal disadvantage, in conflict with an ideal that, however narrow, at least had consistency in itself, does not prevent the cavalier from constituting what some might deem the most attractive of all the successive types of English gentlemen. The very causes that made for his futility serve to enhance his charm. All the argument in the world will never depose him from his favour with an unregenerate posterity, which will always include an overwhelming majority of those who take sides with the gallant figure, booted and cloaked, with his

flowing love-locks, his plumed hat and slashed sleeves, his lace collar and satin breeches, his dare-devil recklessness and overflowing vitality, against the crop-headed, sober-clad figure that stands in modern eyes for the typical Puritan—not so unexceptionally as might be imagined, if we may trust Sir Thomas Herbert's description of Major Harrison, one of the most uncompromising extremists—"gallantly mounted and armed; a velvet monteur was on his head, a new buff coat upon his back, and a crimson silk scarf about his waist richly fringed; who, as the King passed by . . . gave the King (whom he was conducting Londonwards to his death) a bow with his head all *a-Solade*, which His Majesty required."

There is something in the spectacle of this regicide zealot, got up in the latest fashion of Vanity Fair, that is horror-inspiring in the grotesqueness of its incongruity.

But we should be quite mistaken, if we were to see in the Cavalier himself the mere godless roysterer that his opponents depicted him. There was no doubt a fair sprinkling of that kidney among his ranks, as there was of canting hypocrites on the other side, but in neither case is it fair to judge the flock by its black sheep. The English gentleman of Charles I's time, whether he stood for King or Parliament, seldom failed to be deeply concerned about his religion. What precipitated the formation of a Royalist party was the threat, not to the King, but to the Church. And the King himself was as devout a Christian, and as pure a moralist, as the sternest precision who hounded him to death.

It is impossible to understand the Cavalier spirit

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without realizing how intimately it is blended with that of the Church. For the Church had become far more than the political convenience it had been to Elizabeth. It was aglow with the enthusiasm of its golden age, brilliant with such a constellation of spiritual lights as would never appear in its skies again.

And yet the Church itself was suffering from the same fundamental inconsistency that we found inherent in the Cavalier ideal. It was trying to escape from the rigour of Protestant logic, by getting back as much as it could, under Protestant auspices, of the grandeur and beauty that had been Rome's. It was one of those thoroughly illogical compromises in which the English mind, with its genius for making the best of both worlds at once, especially delights. No doubt an ultimately indefensible position; but then—to filch the words of an English poet from a very different context—"how it was sweet!"

Sweetness, that word so dear to the Elizabethans, expresses still more to us what was endearing in the Church of the Cavaliers, in contrast to the intransigence of Puritan godliness. Whether or not we consider it a term of Christian compliment, here at least was a religion fit for gentlemen, and one, moreover, prolific of gentleness, in the highest sense of the word.

Whatever faults or flaw may be discovered in the Anglican system of that time, no other, surely, has been adorned in its ministry by a type more lovable than that of George Herbert, in which those two so often divergent ideals of gentlemen and saint are, for once, indistinguishably blended. For this model of a country parson might be said to have achieved saintliness through perfection of manners. Even his communion

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with God proceeds by an interchange of loving courtesies—and how different a God is Herbert's from the implacable and gloomy Jehovah of Calvinism! A God whom His creature addresses freely and spontaneously as "my dear," the gracious lord of the feast, delicately assiduous to put a timid guest at his ease:

sweetly questioning  
If I lacked anything.

Herbert's own manners were not easily distinguishable from those of Herbert's God. One of the virtues that he especially enjoins on the country parson is that of courtesy. Not only will he give freely of his money to relieve the necessities of his poorer parishioners, but he will ask them in turn to his own table, making them sit by him, and carving for them, "who," he says, "are much cheered with such friendliness." But, he enjoins with characteristic thoughtfulness, having asked some, "he taketh his times to do the like to the rest, . . . because country people are very observant of such things, and will not be persuaded, but not being invited, they are hated."

Nor was Herbert only a preacher of manners. He must have had a positive genius for radiating and attracting love, if we may judge by the following incident, which it would be unthinkable to record in any other prose but that of his biographer, Izaak Walton:

"In another walk to Salisbury he saw a poor man with a poorer horse, that was fallen under his load: they were both in distress and needed present help; which Mr. Herbert perceiving, put off his canonical coat, and helped the poor man to unload, and after to load,

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his horse. The poor man blessed him for it, and he blessed the poor man; and was so like the good Samaritan, that he gave him money to refresh himself and his horse; and told him that if he loved himself, he should be merciful to his beast. Thus he left the poor man: and at his coming to his musical friends at Salisbury, they began to wonder that Mr. George Herbert, which used to be so trim and clean, came into that company so soiled and discomposed: but he told them the occasion. And—when one of the company told him that ‘He had disparaged himself with so dirty an employment,’ his answer was, ‘That the thought of what he had done would prove music to him at midnight . . . for if I be bound to pray for all that are in distress, I am sure that I am bound, so far as it is in my power, to practise what I pray for. And though I do not wish for the like occasion every day, yet let me tell you, I would not pass one day of my life without comforting a sad soul, or showing mercy; and I praise God for this occasion. And now let’s tune our instruments.”

We must remember that Herbert was not one of those amiable shepherds of sheeplike mentality, who have inhabited so many parsonages of fiction, and perhaps of fact too, but in the first rank—or only just below it—of English poets, and a man of such distinguished culture that the great Francis Bacon is believed to have submitted his manuscripts to him before publication.

Nor was his case by any means isolated. During the second quarter of the seventeenth century, his distinguishing quality of intellectual sweetness was exemplified in other Churchmen of hardly inferior distinction; in Isaac Fuller, that holy yet irrepressible humorist, of



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whom Coleridge was moved to write, "God bless thee, dear old man! May I meet with thee, which is tantamount to—may I go to heaven!"; in that profound and benevolent scholar Hales of Eton, one of the clearest heads and best prepared breasts in Christendom, according to one contemporary, and described by another as "a pretty little man, sanguine, of a cheerful countenance, very gentle and courteous"; in Bishop Juxon, "that good man" as Charles I, whom he attended on the scaffold, described him, whom not even the sternest of his opponents could find it in his heart to hate, who, incidentally, hunted as good a pack of hounds as any squire in England; in Henry King, Bishop of Chichester, "the epitome," according to Anthony Wood, "of all honours, virtues and generous nobleness, and a person never to be forgotten by his tenants, and by the poor," and whose lines to his dead wife rank surely among the most precious tributes of love ever offered in verse:

Stay for me there, I will not fail  
To meet thee in that hollow vale!

One might go on to cite such examples as those of Donne, Ferrar, Chillingworth, and many another, in support of Herbert's own tribute to the Church he adored:

I joy, dear Mother, when I view  
Thy perfect lineaments, and hue  
Both sweet and bright.

Beauty in thee takes up her place,  
And dates her letters from thy face  
When she doth write.

If we are right in believing that the ideal of a gentle-

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man is founded on the confirmation of strength in gentleness, the importance of the Church's part in its formation can hardly be overestimated. For never, at any time, can there have existed a finer school of gentle manners. And no doubt even the best manners of the time were in need of much softening and sweetening. The savage in man takes many generations to eliminate, and there was still much that to our modern notions would seem merely barbarious in all but the very finest manners of the time. Even in Charles I's time there was on view one incredibly old man who, at least by his own account, had been born in the reign of Edward IV—a reminder that the gentleman in the Van Dyck portrait was not so very far removed from his Yorkist or Lancastrian great-great grandfather.

We are fortunate in having one inimitable portrait of what must have been a fair, average specimen of that great majority of English gentlemen, who seldom left behind any other records except those upon their tombs, and who passed their lives on their own estates, among their own people, without any contact with such civilizing influence as may have emanated from the court. This is the sketch that the first Lord Shaftesbury, of the close designs and crooked counsels, left in an autobiographical fragment, of his Dorsetshire neighbour, Mr. Henry Hastings, who lived into the time of the Commonwealth, and had been born in that of Edward VI. To the youthful Shaftesbury he must have been one of the last of the old school, but to us this fine, old country sportsman seems more familiar than any of his more sophisticated juniors, who have got into history. We must picture him as a stockish wiry old gentleman, always dressed in a plain suit of green

cloth, in a house that was even then old-fashioned, with a bowling green attached that had never been levelled since it had been first laid out; and all around a park, with warrens, fishponds and deer, besides wood and timber, that enabled the estate to be a practically self-sufficing unit, with the addition of a walk in the New Forest and the seaside manor of Christchurch.

Nor was the owner unprovided with the means of exploiting all this to its utmost capacity. He was the master of every imaginable sort of pack; foxhounds, buck hounds, beagles, otter hounds, badger dogs, besides keeping both long and short winged hawks and an assortment of fishing nets. He appears to have acquired, or assumed, the right to hunt and fish on the preserves of all his neighbours as well as his own.

Of the house itself, the great hall was strewn with marrow bones, hung with skins of foxes and polecats "of this or last year's skinning"; stacked with guns, cross bows, and other instruments of the chase. The parlour, "a large, long room" that served for meals, was tenanted by a perfect army of dogs, cats, and hawks—it was seldom that at least two of the great chairs were without a litter of kittens, and Mr. Hastings had to keep a "little white, round, stick lying by his trencher, that he might defend such meat as he had no mind to part with." What the smell of either room must have been like it is perhaps best not to imagine.

But it would have taken more than a stink to have turned the old squire's stomach. He must have had a huge and hearty appetite: he had a special table for the oysters from Poole—one of his few importations—with which he never failed to lay the foundation of dinner and supper. A door opened on to what, in a more

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devout age, had been the family chapel, but which now served as a food repository—the pulpit, in particular, never lacking a cold chine of beef, venison pasty, gammon of bacon, or huge apple pie, with very thick crust. On the other side was the door of the wine and beer closet, out of which not more than a glass at a time was allowed to be brought; for the rules of the house were strict against intemperance. On Fridays, which were the great days for entertaining, the old custom of eating fish was honoured, and this would be followed by a London pudding which Mr. Hastings always used to sing in, to the refrain of:

My part lies therein-a.

At the top of the room, between tables cluttered with an assortment of hawk's hoods, bells, cards, dice, and old green hats, with the crowns knocked in to accommodate pheasants' eggs, stood a desk, that, in addition to his pipes, bore what was not improbably his entire library—a Bible on one side, and Foxe's *Martyrs* on the other. The conversation, one imagines, that was exchanged while the master of the house was sipping his sack mixed with syrup of gilliflowers, or stirring his tun glass of small beer with a great sprig of rosemary, would hardly have passed for more than middle brow, even by modern country house standards. Probably its beginning and end was sport, with perhaps a little obvious and aggressive religion for seasoning.

But sport with Mr. Hastings was not limited to animal quarry, "there being not a woman in all his walks of the degree of yeoman's wife or under, and under the age of forty, but it was extremely her fault if he were not intimately acquainted with her. "This"—if we may

trust Shaftesbury—"made him very popular; always speaking kindly to the husband, brother, or father, who was, to boot, very welcome to his house whenever he came."

To his servants, this fine old English gentleman was good-natured, but liable to explosions of temper, when he would call them bastards and cuckoldy knaves, "in one of which," comments Shaftesbury, "he often spoke truth to his own knowledge, and sometimes in both, though of the same man."

But to a squire who keeps open house with beef and beer, and who, until past eighty, can ride to the death of a stag as well as any, his sins which are many, shall be forgiven him in the heart of Alfred's—and Thomas Hardy's—Wessex.

No survey, however cursory, of the English gentleman, could fail to take into account the figure of the country squire, so well exemplified by Mr. Hastings. He is, whether we approve of it or not, a prime factor of social stability in the English system, a permanent insurance, so long as the country remains predominantly rural, against revolution. For the whole atmosphere surrounding him is completely different from that of the seigneurs, barons, and boyars of the Continent. Mr. Hastings may call, and make, a peasant neighbour a cuckoldy knave, but he does not call, and treat, him as *canaille*. He approaches him on a common footing of humanity—a lover, and sharer, of beef and beer, a fellow sportsman, and connoisseur of soil and stock, capable of driving as hard a bargain over a horse or bull, on market day, as any farmer or yeoman in the county.

And the squire is something more than Shaftesbury

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chooses to remind us about Mr. Hastings—for he was a permanent and unpaid public functionary, upon whom, and his like, rested practically the whole responsibility for local administration and petty justice. The abuses to which such concentration of power in the hands of a class might and did lead, do not need enlarging on here. But it had this advantage, that though you might tax the squire with tyranny, you could not possibly call him a drone. He was very visibly fulfilling a key function in the common life of the neighbourhood.

And we must remember that in these cavalier times of which I am writing, the life of the country had not yet stabilized itself into a more or less benevolent conspiracy of manor and rectory to keep all things for the best for the best of all possible classes. It was the great endeavour of Charles I, one that achieved a startling but short-lived success under such auspices of those of Strafford and Laud, to combine a government with a church in the best sense national, each, in its sphere, capable of holding the scales even between all classes alike and maintaining the poor man in his right—including that to honest work at a fair wage—against the strongest in the land. That attempt foundered, and Charles died, as he himself said, a martyr for the people. But among the great “*If*s” of history, not the least intriguing is—what sort of an England would have resulted if by a more finesse on the King’s part, or tact on the Archbishop’s, it had succeeded, not for a decade, but a generation.

On that issue we need not speculate. The only point I would wish to make is that, before the catastrophe of the Civil War, it was still open: the Cavalier ideal is

not to be judged by what came after, in a war-weary age barren of ideals. Let us, at anyrate, give it credit for what it actually accomplished, in the breeding and making of gentlemen. And in saying this we must never forget against what a dead weight of dullness and inertia any new ideal of breeding had to contend. The quick-witted courtiers, so many of whom had served a genteel apprenticeship in Paris; the numerous young gentlemen who sharpened their wits at the bar—these might be susceptible of new ideas and capable of adopting heightened standards of culture; but by what channel could culture or refinement percolate to the numberless squires, of whom Mr. Hastings is a type, who passed their lives in an isolation almost bookless, and the strenuous pursuit of animals and such animal satisfactions as those of the table and the bed?

The wonder is what a high standard of manners was inculcated, and what these did as a matter of fact achieve in the making of men. It is no accident that one of the most popular and influential books of the time should have been *The Compleat Gentleman*, of the Reverend Thomas Peacham, which was published three years before King Charles ascended the throne, and which is admirably described by a modern commentator as "a record of the manners, education, and way of thinking, of the better sort of cavalier gentry before the Civil Wars."<sup>1</sup>

Here we have the English counterpart to Castiglione's *Courtier*, but with the significant difference that the training of a gentleman has now come to have as much emphasis on the moral as on the intellectual side—

<sup>1</sup> Mr. C. S. Gordon in his introduction to the Clarendon Press Edition of 1906.

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"whom that you shall entertain into the closet of your breast, first sound their religion." Peacham's gentleman is first and foremost the ruler of his passions, as temperate in all things as Spenser's model Sir Guyon. Only on such a basis is founded the "affability and courtesy in greatness" that, as Peacham beautifully puts it, "draweth our eyes like flowers in spring to behold, and with admiration to love it whenever we find it."

But courtesy can never be unless it is armed with all the knowledge and accomplishments proper to a gentleman. For we must bear clearly in mind, if we are to understand Peacham's—and the Cavalier—point of view, that the education for which he is pleading does not seek to turn young gentlemen into prodigies of scholarship like Salmasius and Casaubon, nor specialize them to produce masterpieces of artistic genius—"that," as Charles I might have said, "is nothing pertaining to them." The gentleman is a man of all round culture, a connoisseur of all knowledge and an initiate of all mysteries—but an amateur, in the sense of regarding these things not as ends in themselves, but as the means of enabling him to play his due part in that station of life to which, as the Church Catechism puts it, it shall please God to call him. For it would no more have occurred to Peacham, than it would to Shakespeare, to doubt that social welfare is founded on the ordered observance of "degree, priority, and place"; or, as we might put it today, on an organic unity in difference of function.

The programme of necessary accomplishments is heroic enough even on an amateur basis. A gentleman's accomplishments start with the training of his body in athletic and field sports, and particularly in horse-



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manship and martial exercises—"throwing and wrestling" being ruled out as only fit for the rank and file. He is expected to have a good working knowledge of geometry, of history, and both the theory and practice of geography—there being a special chapter on the improvement of the mind by travelling. He must be something of an artist; a competent musician—"I desire no more than that you should sing your part sure, and at the first sight, withal to play the same upon your viol, or the exercise of the lute, privately to yourself—"; at least a lover, if not a writer of poetry, and, indispensibly, master of a good style both in English and Latin. He must also be enough of an antiquarian to be able to enrich himself and his country with the objects of ancient art that are to be picked upon the Continent; and must be at home in all the intricacies of heraldry. Finally he is expected to have at least enough knowledge of soldiering to qualify him for the command of a company.

It is all very well, one may say, for a reverend ex-schoolmaster to insist on all these requirements—but where were such gentlemen to be found in real life? Not certainly among the like of old Mr. Hastings, and rural backwoodsmen of that type. Not too often, as Peacham would have been the first to admit, among even the most polite circles at the time of his writing—indeed the specific occasion had been some highly uncomplimentary strictures passed by a French nobleman on the unemployability, for any courtly function, of young English gentlemen abroad.

The very existence and vogue of such a book shows that there was at least a tendency to make up the leeway; and the instances of Falkland, and his circle,

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and—in so far as England may claim him—Prince Rupert, show that there were cavaliers capable of greatly surpassing Peacham's requirements.

But even if there were no other instance to cite of the gentleman complete at all points, as defined by Peacham, there would be the obvious and undubitable one of King Charles himself: sportsman, musician, artist, connoisseur, soldier, and, as he proved at the end, capable of expressing himself in some of the most moving prose in the language. I might add—except that I must wait for a more propitious opportunity to maintain so challenging a case—capable of displaying the highest qualities of a lawyer (it is curious, by the way, that Peacham should have passed over this almost indispensable accomplishment of the English, as it had been of the Roman patrician), of a statesman, and, after he had found his soul and had it purified in the fire of suffering, of a Christian.

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THE Cavalier cause only triumphed with the death of the Cavalier spirit. Eleven kingless years might have been as many decades. The most penetrating thing ever said about the Restoration was thrown off in two careless lines of a song:

'Tis well an old age is out!  
And time to begin a new!

Already in 1660 we are nearer in spirit to Sheridan and Beau Brummell than we are to Herbert and Falkland. Nor does this seem so paradoxical when we remember that the desire of the old age was towards a past already dead, while that of the new was to break with the past altogether, and to enter at once into a Promised Land of enlightenment of reason.

That is to say, so far as the intelligentsia of the metropolis and Court is concerned. With the great, inexpressive body of gentlemen, who were not only country but countrified, progress of any sort was limited by the pace of their minds, and the extent of their contact with the outer world. They carried on with their farming and their sport in a spirit not perceptibly different from that of pre-civil-war days, and only modified by the fact that they were now in a position of authority more above challenge than ever before.

If we are to understand the English gentleman, during the long gentleman's paradise that stretches between the time of the Restoration and the dawn of

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the machine age, we must always see him against this stolid and bucolic background, and realize that this mode of life is something peculiar to England herself, that makes the crucial difference between English and foreign notions of breeding.

The squirearchy has left comparatively few intimate records of its heyday. Even in the greatest mansions, we are seldom informed what were the private thoughts and feelings of those people of such importance, who stare at us so self-containedly from the dining room walls of their former homes. But why and of what should they have unburdened themselves? They got whatever they were capable of demanding from life, riding hard and drinking harder, farming and gendering issue, until, with all appropriate formality, their coffins were added to the pile in the family vault, and their memory faded.

Fortunately, an art of fiction was beginning to be practised that has to some extent supplied the deficiency, by immortalizing the representative personalities of Addison's Sir Roger de Coverley, and—a generation later—of Fielding's Squire Western. We all know the figure of Sir Roger, at once so laughable and so lovable—too lovable, it might have been objected, to carry entire conviction, were it not that even today the type is not wholly extinct. That pleasant habit of saluting every passer by with a good morrow or good night, that entirely unconscious assumption of authority, that naïve piety and patriotism, that patriarchal benevolence . . . the perennial charm of Sir Roger is that most of us seem to recognize him. Or is it because we too, like Addison, are inclined to be a little sentimental on the subject? For what is Sir Roger himself but

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Shaftesbury's Mr. Hastings seen through rose-tinted spectacles, and Bowdlerized for a *Spectator* audience.

Even so, Sir Roger's charm is hardly more conspicuous than its accompanying lack of intellect. He is a dear, but extremely stupid and prejudiced old gentleman. And in Fielding's Squire Western, we have all the stupidity without the least redeeming spice of sentiment. His must certainly have been a far more common type than that of Sir Roger—since hearts of pure gold are rare in any walk of life—this boorish and illiterate gentleman-clodhopper, who cannot even speak his own language, except in the patois of a yokel, and whose defects are not even endearing. He is graspingly mercenary; his only thought is to dispose of his daughter's hand to the highest bidder, and when he hears that young Tom Jones, whose suit he has repulsed with contumely, is to come into Mr. Allworthy's money, he makes a complete *volte face*, and hurries on the wedding with indecent, and indecently expressed, haste. As for his patriotism, he would welcome the arrival of "twenty-thousand honest Frenchmen" to upset the reigning dynasty. On one occasion he even evinces the symptoms of physical cowardice. His conversation, before ladies, would disgrace a taproom. As a magistrate—and Fielding himself was one—he has been had twice before the King's Bench for abusing his authority. His chief interest and pleasure in life consists in galloping about the country, halloaing on his dogs to the pursuit of foxes and hares. And yet, in a way, we cannot help a sort of sneaking liking for the old fellow; he is so genuine and human with it all.

We have thus the typical countrified squire, seen through the eyes, first of a sentimentalist, and then of

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a realist. Sir Roger and Old Western are different aspects of the same phenomenon, or perhaps we might say its limiting extremes of possible variation. But their sameness is more significant than their difference. Either of them would have been a great deal happier in the other's company, than among the people of wit and fashion whom they met on their rare visits to town. Introduce either of them to a typical French seigneur, and he will know not what point of contact to establish with such barbarian intelligences.

No more doubt of Sir Roger, in his own way, possessing than of Mr. Western lacking the manners of a gentleman! The old knight is both a strong man and a gentle. But his breeding, perfect as it is on its own level, is not much more advanced than that of the perfect little gentleman of the nursery. If we want manners that are not primitive, but finished, we may seek them forever in this bucolic environment.

Thus, if the ideal of an English gentleman is to develop at all, we must look for some cultured influence strong enough to establish a nucleus of urbanity, capable of resisting, and perhaps, in time, of reclaiming, this indurated provincialism. And to find this, we must forsake our insular standpoint of the last two chapters, and try to understand what had been happening on the other side of the Channel. For European culture may be likened to a race, in which first one horse and then another takes the lead. In the fifteenth century and beyond, Italy had led the field; next Spain had made her bid: Spanish manners, like Spanish cloaks, and hats, and boots had been all the vogue. But by the middle of the seventeenth century, it had become evident to all the world that Spain was a spent force,

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not only politically but spiritually. The long period of French supremacy had begun, a supremacy which a succession of Grand European Alliances was able to confine within visible frontiers, but to which, in the invisible world of the mind, the only limits were those of Christian civilization. During a time that may be dated from the rise of Richelieu to the French Revolution, it would be substantially true to say that European culture and French culture are one and the same thing. What Mecca was to the devout Moslem, that, to the polite European of Europe's politest century, was Louis XIV's great palace at Versailles. It was the centre round which his spiritual world revolved, even when his country and France were at war.

To England, the most deeply significant thing that had happened at the Restoration, was not that this or that faction had triumphed in the State, but that French culture had crossed the Channel, and like an invading army, established its headquarters in the Palace of Whitehall. Its vicegerent was that very typical Frenchman, the true son of his mother and grandson of the Great Henri Quatre, whom his courtiers nicknamed, after a certain disreputable but favourite Billy goat, Old Rowley.

For however much the enthronement of a second Charles may have been held to have sealed the triumph of the Cavalier cause, the man himself had less in common with the genuine cavaliers than a Milton or a Cromwell. They had belonged to an age of sentiment and idealism; his attitude to life was one of an amused disillusionment, coupled with a hunger and thirst after all the visible and sensible satisfactions it had to offer, with a special—and characteristically French—emphasis

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on those of sex. Not that there had been any lack of lusty lovers among the cavaliers themselves; but Charles introduced something different, and new, to even the best English circles—a lightness of touch, a delicacy of style, that is based upon a cultivated mastery of the emotions. It is the note we catch in so much of the music of the late seventeenth, and eighteenth, centuries—that, particularly, of Mozart—a certain genteel detachment and reserve proper to well-bred intercourse.

Charles, like his father, is one of the great gentlemen of history—but how different a sort of gentleman! He is almost to be commiserated that he never had a chance to make his final exit from the same tragic scaffold. Only with him, it would not have been tragic. His last words would not have been of the good cause and the merciful God on his side, and they would quite possibly have struck the attendant bishop as regrettably inappropriate. But we may be certain that the royal comedian would have dominated the scene as completely as his tragic predecessor, though in a different way. He would never have been canonized; but he would have made the saints who martyred him look so foolish, that neither prestige nor respect would ever have clung to them thereafter.

What impresses one most about Charles is the easy control that he maintained over the motley and riotous set that gave its tone to his court, and indeed over almost everyone who was brought into contact with him.

Hardly ever, even in the most trying circumstances, was he known to be ruffled out of his good-nature; hardly ever did the wittiest challenger come off any-



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thing but second best in a verbal interchange. And Charles's wit was of that true comic spirit praised by George Meredith, which is the most penetrating form of wisdom. Thus his reply to Lord Rochester's famous epitaph on him, as never having said a foolish thing nor done a wise one, was a bland reminder that

"My words are my own; my acts are my ministers'!" about as effective an *apologia pro vita sua* as man ever compressed into a sentence. No less acute, if rightly understood, was his remark on seeing his portrait by that still neglected great master, John Riley—he whose gift it was to expose the innermost souls of his sitters:

"Is this I, Mr. Riley? Then, odds fish, I am an ugly fellow."

It would be almost as true to say of the second as the first Charles, that "he nothing common did nor mean." He wore his virtues—as Scott said that Byron managed his pen—"with the careless and negligent ease of a man of quality," but they formed no small part of what goes to make up a gentleman. In his unostentatious way he could be very loyal, too loyal, in fact, when he risked his throne and all that made life endurable for him, rather than see his impossible, and one imagines uncongenial, brother cut out of the succession. It is characteristic of him that all the gossip and research of nearly three centuries, has failed to unlock his secret of the identity of that lady, on the Isle of Jersey, to whom, alone of all his loves, he gave his heart as well as his embraces. And even to his unloved and unattractive Portuguese Queen, he proved a chivalrous protector in the hour of her greatest peril.

There was one exception, and a highly significant

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one, to this rule. The most ungentlemanly thing with which Charles can be taxed, and the one that we find it hardest to forgive, was his abandoning his tried and faithful minister, Clarendon, the very embodiment of cavalier loyalty, to be disgraced and ruined in his old age. It is a stain on Charles's reputation that defies whitewashing. But his conduct will be at least explicable, if we remember that the one thing that his French mentality rendered him incapable of tolerating, was *ennui*. And the grand old man of Cavalierdom, with his solemn formality, and his perpetual airs of the heavy father, must have bored his former pupil almost to distraction. It is startling enough to find anything in common between Victoria the Good and her merry predecessor, but the effect of Clarendon on Charles must have been remarkably similar to that of Gladstone on the Sovereign whom he would persist in addressing as if she were a public meeting. Only with Charles, the reaction was that of the new age to the old; the two styles of life, the light and the heavy, were incapable of harmonizing.

But it was beyond even Charles to communicate the Versailles touch to the manners of his court. He himself was as perfectly cut as his grandfather Henri, and more than his cousin Louis, for the role of popular French monarch; but the wits and gallants of his entourage were not to the manner born, and were incapable of reproducing it, except in a sort of crude English paraphrase. Vice with them lost nothing of its grossness; such poets and wits as Lord Buckhurst, afterwards Earl of Dorset, and Sir Charles Sedley, could think of no better evening's frolic than that of first getting swinishly drunk; next divesting themselves of every stitch of

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clothing, and in that condition exhibiting themselves on a balcony in the most indecent postures they could think of, shouting out smut and blasphemy to the crowd beneath. This sort of thing would have passed at Versailles not so much for immoral, as stupid and vulgar—conduct more fitting for grooms than gentlemen. And there is this same note of barbarousness and brutality about all the gay court life of the Restoration. No doubt there were compensations. No courtier of Louis XIV could have turned out such charming lyrics as at least half a dozen of the Restoration rakes did on occasion—the swan song, one might say, of the Cavalier muse.

Here we have the beginning of a conflict, or compromise, that persists in England throughout the whole period of the French cultural ascendancy. To the great outer fringe of the country squirearchy, any sort of civilizing influence percolated so slowly as to make its effect only perceptible, if at all, over a long period of time. But then, at the centre of things, was an aristocratic minority whose notions of breeding and culture conformed as closely as possible to the Versailles standard, and who resembled a civilized garrison in a primitive land. Once let that garrison be withdrawn, and the barbarians of the fringe would have it all their own way.

But we must not think of French culture as something fixed and unchanging during all this time. That also was in process of evolution; the formal Baroque style of the *Grand Monarque* was quite different from the light Rococo of the Louis Quinze. It was by virtue of this dynamic quality that France was able, for so long a period, to set the tone to Europe, and that the manners

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of a gentleman continued to be modelled on those of the French gentleman.

Through all the phases of their development, these manners were the expression of one constant ideal of aristocratic civilization. The gentleman was almost on the footing of a new and superior species; he stood, at any rate, in much the same relationship to those without the pale, as thoroughbred to carthorse. Civilization existed to produce him; life, as it could and should be lived, at its highest, was for him alone.

This, of course, was the direct negation of the idea of Christianity, in which all men are equal in sight of God. But to the man of breeding, at any rate in the *Louis Quinze* time, God Himself had ceased to be anything but a polite fiction, to be taken seriously only by those outside the pale. Religion itself had ceased to be any more than a social convenience, designed to enlist in the service of the existing order the emotions of those who still harboured them.

The gentleman was civilized to the point of having his feelings so perfectly under control, that they had almost ceased to exist. Manners were not only the improvement of nature, but its complete suppression. It was extremely vulgar to indulge those primitive instincts that were supposed to have their origin in the heart. Louis XV, who, in spite of himself, shed two big tears on seeing the funeral of his beloved Pompadour, was only forcing himself to do the correct thing when he remarked that Madame had a wet day for her journey. No gentleman—as was abundantly proved in the days of the guillotine—would have made any heavier weather of his own demise.

It was the same with all of the primitive emotions.

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Even that of mother for child was no exception to the rule; a French child of good birth was taken away to be nursed and brought up by peasant foster parents, and if allowed to appear at all in polite company, the poor little wretch must needs ape the dress and style of a grand seigneur. As for love, a genteel promiscuity was not only tolerated, but almost an obligation. A lady of fashion would have been as incomplete without her lovers as without her fan; nor would any husband of the world—provided such affairs were conducted with a reasonable discretion—have yielded to the vulgar impulse of jealousy. Indeed it is recorded of one, who discovered his consort *in flagrante delicto*, that he merely reminded her how awkward it would have been, if anybody but himself had surprised her, in a situation so compromising.

Not even the desire for comfort was altogether genteel. In France the whole dress and environment of a person of taste were chosen with a complete disregard of anything but a refined magnificence. After perhaps being lifted, like the Duc d'Artois, and lowered into your creaseless breeches, you sat, if such a feat were practicable, upon a chair which forced you to balance yourself bolt upright, with one excrescence bulging into your back, and another punching up stiffly beneath the seat of the said breeches. As for the chair itself, its legs seemed to writhe beneath you in fantastic curvature, like petrified serpents. As if a gentleman's furniture could demean itself even to the semblance of utility!

One characteristic the *gentil homme* shared with the righteous person of Scripture. He could never be moved. Nothing, even of the most tragic, could excite

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him out of that faintly amused detachment with which he regarded all that ever came under his notice. Nothing human or divine could ruffle the surface of that urbanity. On the duelling ground a competition in politeness preceded the more serious business; on the field of battle enemy commanders could waive the privilege of the first volley. National disaster, and even disgrace, merely provided food for epigram in the *salons* of Paris. The whole court, male and female, could turn out to watch, with critical appreciation, the spectacle provided for it of a crazy, would-be regicide, being put to death by the most elaborately artistic programme of tortures that could be devised. That—like the news of the French Grand Army on the run before half its number of Prussians—was enough to keep boredom at arm's length for an afternoon, and what more could you expect of anything?

The essence of good breeding consisted in artifice. Life, for its privileged élite, was exquisitely planned, to the end of the most refined attainable satisfaction. Any touch of nature was counted for defilement, because nature cannot be planned, but herself compels.

One feature, and perhaps the most important of all, of this design of living, was the way in which it was dominated by feminine influence. The French gentleman of birth was in more than one sense a product of the French lady. The same faculty that enables the modern French *bourgeoise* widow to take over her defunct husband's business, and increase its profits, enabled a whole succession of inspired hostesses, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to organize culture. This they did, most of all, by that characteristically French institution of the *salon*. It was in these

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gatherings that the wit and talent of the time was made to yield its maximum contribution to the common enjoyment. A hostess of genius—and there were several who merit the title—was able to an extraordinary extent to set the stamp of her own personality upon such gatherings, to draw out the latent capacities of her guests, and set them fertilizing each others' ideas. There may, especially in early days, have been a good deal of affectation and precocity, but this was a malady that tended to cure itself. And, after all, did it not constitute an almost miraculous feat to have kept a company of mercurial French people exchanging ideas for perhaps hours on end, without ever getting bored in the process?

The greatest minds of the age were fain to adapt themselves to the requirements of the *salons*: the requirements, that is to say, of an educated audience that refused to be edified unless it was first interested. Philosophy scintillated; no new idea, however subversive, came amiss provided it was wittily expressed; none, however profound, could pass muster, unless on terms as to render it acceptable in polite society.

It was, when all is said and done, at least as notable a feat of conquest as any accomplished in arms by Louis XIV or Napoleon, thus to have maintained, for so long a period, an invisible suzerainty over European culture. In the eighteenth century, at any rate, it would be hardly an exaggeration to say, that the more complete the gentleman, the more closely he was fashioned on the French model. We may like or dislike this model as we will, but we must admit that it possesses all the attractiveness of its own style of art, so tastefully ornate, so consummately finished.

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It is an ideal in the strictest sense aristocratic. The French *gentil homme*, as I have tried to show, was so by virtue of his birth. True, he would not have thought of disputing his own proverb, *noblesse oblige*. And his generous appreciation of intellect led him to lower the otherwise impassible barriers not only to the ideas, but to the persons, of men qualified only by their brains, or even, like Casanova, by their individuality. But we know to what humiliation even the greatest of them, Voltaire, had to submit from some insolent cub of a nobleman.

The French aristocrat was a being set apart in a double sense. He did not even, like his feudal ancestor, live on his land among his own people. They only knew him as a visitor who dropped down upon them for a month or two in the year, as from another world, and whom the fruits of their labours were exploited to maintain. Those who try to prove that the French peasants were often no worse off under their seigneurs than English yokels under their squires, are missing the point. The Marquis de Carabas may not perhaps have pressed so heavily on his people as some have supposed, but, from their point of view, there was no conceivable reason why he should have pressed at all. He did nothing for them; he knew nothing about them; he openly despised them . . . why cumbered he the ground? Whereas old Squire Western—everybody knew all about him, and his doings; he was almost one of themselves, and even when he swore at them from the saddle, or blustered at them from the Bench, it was all reported, not without gusto, in the village alehouse. A brother sportsman, a son of the same soil, a speaker of the same dialect . . . one could put up



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with a good deal from *him*, whereas with M. le Marquis—what earthly or heavenly reason could there be for not making a bonfire of his château the moment it could be done with impunity?

*CIVILIZATION AGAINST BEEFS*

So long as there is a court at Versailles, so long is the soul of the English gentleman the battle ground of two contending influences, of French aristocratic culture and of a native tradition inherited from generations of ancestors whose merits—and they were many—were more of character than of taste or intellect. So that we must expect to find him a decidedly mixed product, and mixed in very varying proportions.

What is the interesting, and crucial, question, concerns the effect of this foreign influence on the English mentality, and the extent to which it has power to spread beyond those directly subjected to it. For it is obvious that the average petty squire would have had little chance to become Frenchified, which to him would probably have signified the consumption of frogs. With the best will in the world, he could not have afforded it nor was the will likely to be present in so self-satisfied a John Bull.

A real liberal education in those days was an expensive thing. To be anything like complete, it had to include residence abroad so that culture might be imbibed at the fountain head. Best of all, when the state of Europe permitted it, was what was known as the Grand Tour, in which the youth emerging from boyhood would be conducted round all the places supposed to be most important and interesting, by some tutor, or bear-leader—most probably in orders. Very fascinating is the record of such tours, when like

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young Lord Oxford in the early seventeen twenties, the pupil was expected to note down everything of interest on each day's journey. Nor was the experience all of a pedagogic nature; the tour would be pretty sure to include Venice, Casanova's Venice, now no longer the bride of the sea, but the mistress of all comers.

It was an education far beyond anything within the scope of the modern tourist. For there was a freemasonry in those days among men and women of breeding. The Grand Tourist would be pretty sure to have introductions to the best society of the capitals he visited; he would attend court functions, and be brought into contact with the leaders of rank and intellect; he would be much to blame if he missed that most educational of all experiences that is provided by an affair with an experienced woman. He might come home, indeed, a finished rake or a spendthrift gambler—these little risks had to be taken—but he could hardly fail to have acquired a standard of manners far beyond anything he could have picked up from his native countryside.

Let it be clear, however, that it was not merely a case of young island barbarians being refined by an admittedly superior civilization. If Versailles was the recognized fountain head of culture for educated Englishmen, there was, in some ways, hardly less admiration for things English in France itself. English political institutions, very imperfectly understood, English philosophy and science, as associated especially with the names of Locke and Newton, were all the rage among the leaders of the French Enlightenment, as the most advanced thought before the Revolution came to be called. Nay, at one time there was a regular

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Anglomania, that extended to a cult of English fashions—and this when the two countries were at war with North America and India for prizes! For the freemasonry of gentlefolk was at least superior to the modern nationalism that tries to corner even the things of the spirit for its obsessive self-glorification.

No one who knows the English mind will ever imagine it capable of becoming a sensitive plate, on which French or any other notions can be printed. However humbly it may seek to learn, it will react to these things in its own way. Nor is that way necessarily inferior. Look at the difference between *Louis Quinze* furniture, and the sort of work that was being done in England by Chippendale and Hepplewhite. The French chair or writing table is sumptuous beyond comparison, but the English has the compensating merit of being precisely and beautifully adapted to its use. And it does give you a certain sense of comfort, even in looking at a chair, if you feel it is made to be sat on.

Like furniture, like manners. Nothing will ever prevent an Englishman from translating a foreign style into his own idiom. Even among that leavening minority who consciously modelled their ways on the Versailles pattern, there was the same sort of difference that we have noticed in English furniture. There was—shall we put it?—a greater foursquareness and solidity; and a decidedly greater tendency to stress the importance of the moral factor.

English fiction has provided us with one classic example of the ideal gentleman in action, or rather, through most of the seven volumes, in correspondence and conversation. This is the *Sir Charles Grandison* of

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Samuel Richardson, which was published in 1753. It was last of three famous novels, and was written after he had set all educated Europe weeping at the long drawn out sorrows of his unfortunate heroine *Clarissa Harlow*. There he had drawn the portrait of a bold, bad young man called *Lovelace*, whom, in spite of his villainy, many female readers had been so unregenerate as to find attractive. It had rather distressed Richardson to think that he should thus unwittingly have turned devil's advocate. This time there should be no mistake about it. Just as the Greek sculptors embodied their ideal of humanity in the figures of their gods, so would he embody his ideal gentleman in *Sir Charles*, and everyone would see how very much more attractive *Sir Charles* was than the disreputable *Lovelace*.

It is true that the excellent Mr. Richardson, like so many people who have idealized gentlemen, was of humble origin, being in fact the son of a working man, and himself a printer; a little, red, chubby, prosy personage, who had succeeded in becoming the centre of a circle of adoring females, of whose moods and feelings he had a more than feminine understanding. He had not the least experience of the type of society he was depicting, and in fact is constantly giving himself away—*Sir Charles's* sister, for instance, who is supposed to be extremely arch and charming, merely succeeds in being rude and, as her own sex would certainly put it, not a lady. But this does not affect the point that *Sir Charles* did succeed in getting himself accepted as the almost proverbial man of perfect manners. The present author may perhaps be forgiven for mentioning how that very typical Vic-

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torian lady, his grandmother, on the unfortunately rare occasions on which he himself was supposed to have conformed to her standards of politeness, would murmur an approving, "Sir Charles Grandison!"

The goodness of Sir Charles is as unqualified as it is interminable, and is founded on the sure rock of a princely income. He descends upon the story in a highly appropriate and opportune manner. A young heiress, a Miss Byron, has rejected the proposal of a certain Sir Hargrave Pollexfen, the equal in rank and wealth of Sir Charles—but how regrettably different in character! Miss Byron is very clear that the moral issue is prohibitive. Sir Hargrave naturally abducts her, in a sedan chair, from a masque, and announcing that his attentions are conditionally honourable, is driving her off to one of his country houses, after an attempt to effect matrimony by means of a Fleet Street parson has been foiled by the young lady's invincible capacity for throwing fits. Some way out of town, the coach is held up by an encounter with a chariot and six; there is a cry for help, a command to stop, curses from Sir Hargrave, a push with his rapier, and then Sir Charles, one of whose innumerable principles it is never to fight duels, tosses him bodily into the road, breaking three of his teeth in the process, catches up the lady lightly in his arms, transfers her to the chariot, and, as expeditiously as may be, entrusts the supervision of her fits to his sister.

The two young people are of course smitten hopelessly with each others' charms, but there are still six volumes to cover between them and the altar. There is, of course, another lady, an Italian, with whom Sir Charles has got some sort of a prior understanding, and all parties

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go into agonies of gentility and self-abnegation in the attempt to adjust their mutual relationships. And even when the engagement does come off, it prolongs itself for the last couple of volumes, in order to bring into full relief the perfections of the hero.

Sir Charles Grandison is as English a creation as John Bull himself. No French author could have given birth to anything remotely resembling him. He is both intensely serious and intensely moral—Herbert Spencer himself was not more doggedly determined to weigh the exact ethical content of every motive and every action. There is a truly wonderful scene in which Sir Charles arrives at the house of Sir Hargrave, who not unnaturally demands satisfaction for his missing incisors. But Sir Charles is not the man to be drawn into a practice of which he disapproves—he has come not to fight, but to lecture. His opponent does indeed get him into the garden and strike a fencing attitude, but Sir Charles, with his customary omnipotence, puts down his sword with one hand, and putting the other arm, rather in the ju jitsu style, under Sir Hargrave's armpit, leads him like a child into the house, and proceeds to moralize at him and his friends over the breakfast table for what must have been most of the morning, citing the opinions on the subject of duelling of everyone who was ever known to have expressed them, from Tullus Hostilius down to, and beyond, the Council of Trent, in support of "that true heroism which Christianity enjoins, when it recommends meekness, moderation, and humility as the glory of human nature."

"But," as Sir Charles remarks at this point, "I am running into length," and it is possible that a modern

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audience may be less clamorous for him to proceed than those Jobs of the breakfast table. And we are already sufficiently well acquainted with him to realize what very different notions they had in England of the ideal gentleman, from any that could possibly have obtained at Versailles.

Nevertheless there was an elect, and extremely influential minority, who did endeavour to fashion themselves, and the society in which they moved, on the purest French model. Conspicuous among these was that most attractive of all aristocratic triflers, Horace Walpole, who is as indisputably the king of English letter writers as Pepys of English diarists. He might be described as a very crusader of triviality, since the guiding purpose of his life was to combat the stolidity and inertia that made English society, and especially that of the country houses, so deadly to one who had learnt the characteristic French urbanity and lightness of touch.

There was something more in this attitude than a mere cultured susceptibility to foreign influence. It was founded on a deep-seated resentment that had been planted in the very depths of his soul. For Horace, we must remember, was the son of the great Sir Robert Walpole, who typified all that was most Philistine and material in the England of the Pudding Age. Delicacy of sentiment, the desire for intellectual beauty, could find no lodgement beneath Sir Robert's great wig; though he possessed, in more abundant measure, perhaps, than any other of the long list of English premiers, that intuitive commonsense that is the saving grace of English statesmanship. His conversational recipe for the gatherings from which the young Horace must



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have formed his first notions of social life, was to talk smut, this being a subject in which everyone was sure to display an equal interest. Hard riding—hard living—hard drinking—and dominating all, the enormous figure and voice of his father; how the delicate young “Horry” must have longed to get away from it all into something as different and opposite as possible! How he must have, and in fact did, loathe anything during his long life that tended to remind him of it!

Listen to him, a young man in his twenty-sixth year, and just returned from a sojourn in Italy to that grand paternal mansion:

“Only imagine that I here every day see men, who are mountains of roast beef, and seem just roughly hewn out into outlines of the human form, like the giant-rock of Protolino. I shudder when I see them brandish their knives in act to carve, and look on them as savages that devour one another. I should not stare at all more than I do, if yonder alderman at the lower end of the table was to stick his fork into his neighbour’s jolly cheek, and cut a brave slice of brawn and fat. Why, I’ll swear I see no difference between a country gentleman and a sirloin; whenever the first laughs or the latter is cut, there run out the same streams of gravy! Indeed, the sirloin does not ask quite so many questions.”

These Beefs—as Horace used to call them—how well we know their likeness from contemporary prints and illustrations! Hogarth revelled in depicting every feature of their great coarse vitality, that can almost be smelt, as we watch them gorging and swilling and belching through jutting lips, in all their brutality, and lust, and dullness of intellect. The story is carried on—

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it is the sons and grandsons of these same Beefs whom we behold through the eyes of Rowlandson and Gillray; these human animals wallowing in their animality.

It is only against such a background that we can see the delicate figure of Sir Horace in its true perspective. One might say that he fled to an idealized Versailles, as Bunyan's Pilgrim from the City of Destruction heavenwards. Like so many converts, he went to greater lengths of orthodoxy than any true believer. He tried to be more French than France itself. The lightness of touch was transformed, with him, into a very fanaticism of triviality. He saw himself as a butterfly, flitting about in graceful idleness from flower to flower; but unfortunately the flowers on which he most preferred to settle resembled the artificial sort that are made up of tinsel and coloured paper—for Walpole's taste, except in his own craft of writing, was lamentable. The wonderful sham-Gothic house he put up at Strawberry Hill has certainly a charm, but one of sheer absurdity, like the poetry of unadulterated nonsense. And he was never able to share, or probably even suspect, the intellectual ardour beneath so much of that apparent triviality of the *salons*. The deadly seriousness, for example, of Voltaire!

It is possible to overdo even lightness; and Walpole's reaction from the Beefs could betray him, sometimes, into a callousness foreign to his nature. When he announces to a correspondent:

"Was ever so agreeable a man as King George the Second, to die the very day it was necessary to save me from ridicule? I was to have kissed hands tomorrow."

He is at least in the authentic French vein, but when he goes on, a little later:

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"My man Harry will always be a favourite; he tells me all the amusing news; he first told me of the late Prince of Wales's death, and today of the King's."

That is merely brutal, and as deplorable a lapse of caste as the sham Gothic.

It would be ungenerous to over-emphasize such blemishes on the surface of superficiality. In his own way, Walpole stood in the forefront of a great battle for civilization. Was the name of gentleman in England to be synonymous with that of Beef? that was the question. Was it possible to create a radiant centre of urbanity powerful enough to counteract the indurated provincialism of the squirearchy?

There could, unfortunately, be no question of this need being supplied by the Court. The Glorious Revolution had settled that matter for a century. What Dutch William, or hen-like Anne, or the first two Hanoverian Georges might care—if they cared at all—about taste or manners, mattered to nobody. The real power had passed into the hands of an oligarchy, and that oligarchy would have to generate its own nucleus of culture out of men, like Horace Walpole, who had come into contact with Continental, and particularly French, influences. It came to this, that so long as Versailles flourished, the Beefs would never constitute the sum total of the English gentry. There would always be a sort of informal court, or communion of the elect, to serve as an incentive to higher, or humaner, things.

Almost as great an apostle of the French spirit was Lord Chesterfield, whose letters to his son constitute as perfect a book of instruction in polite manners as that aristocratic civilization was capable of producing. What does, however, strike one as characteristically English

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about it, is that it should have been produced at all. A French nobleman would never have dreamed of sitting down to act in the capacity of his son's tutor; he would never have been able to bend his own mind to such didactic employment. The society in which he moved was too inwardly permeated with the idea of gentlemanly breeding, to make it a subject for conscious exposition. These things could be trusted to sink in, without being driven. The atmosphere of Versailles was not favourable to sermons, and the letters with which Chesterfield bombarded the rather lumpish young man whom he had begotten out of wedlock, were but a prolonged course of sermons in manners. And, as befitted a country in which the art of preaching had been cultivated with such unsurpassed enthusiasm, they were extremely good sermons.

For Chesterfield was a Sir Charles Grandison, who knew infinitely more of the ways and usages of polite society than Sir Charles's creator could possibly have imparted to his creature. He was also one of those few Englishmen of whom, like Edward VII, it could have been said that he was a good Parisian. It is characteristic of him that he should actually have introduced such words as *friseur* and *etiquette* into the usage of his own country. He was thus in the unique position of being able to expound the principles of French society, in one where such principles needed to be explained point by point, like table manners to a very small child.

We need not attempt to recapitulate them here. They demand to be read in the original, and would even today form about the best manual that could be put into the hands of any young man, who could be induced to take them seriously, and to adapt their principles

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to modern conditions. They would certainly supply him with far better value, at proportionately less cost, than can be extracted from any of the secret and expensive modern courses in personal magnetism, and other means of social-cum-business advancement.

What is most characteristic of the eighteenth century ideal of a gentleman, is the complete discipline of self restraint that Chesterfield enjoins. He himself, as we know from his attitude towards his son, was of a human and affectionate disposition, but it is evident that he regards any advertisement of a man's emotions in society as the height of ungentlemanliness. Even so unrestrained a thing as a laugh is taboo, "true wit, or sense, never yet made anybody laugh, they are above it." The gentleman smiles often; he laughs never. The idea is obviously to eliminate friction from the social mechanism; to create the sort of intercourse from which the finest and most delicate pleasure can be derived. It is on much the same principle that a polite audience will remain still and silent during the performance of good music.

That Chesterfield could have had any part or lot in the life of the English squirearchy is sheerly inconceivable. He does not, like Horace Walpole, regard the "Beefs" and their ways with fascinated horror; he quietly ignores them. He would certainly not have esteemed the pleasures of sport by day, followed by nocturnal drinking bouts, as befitting such men of pleasure as he admitted to having been himself, and as he did not discourage his son from becoming. The most exquisite, and therefore the most gentlemanly pleasures came from the cultivation not of the body, but the mind. A discreet love affair, for example. . . .

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It must not be thought that the civilized nucleus, the kingless court of the British oligarchy, consisted of no more than one or two Frenchified Englishmen. That the aristocratic intelligentsia could and did fulfil its proper function of giving a national lead both in manners and culture, will be evident when we consider such names as those of Gibbon, Cavendish and Boswell, in addition to those of Horace Walpole and Chesterfield. Moreover, like the French aristocracy, and with far less an assumption of superiority, this upper class society drew into its orbit men of intellectual or artistic distinction, who had no pretensions to gentle birth. Such men of genius as Dr. Johnson, Sir Joshua Reynolds, David Garrick, and Hume, had at least as many points of contact with the best society as such men are ever likely to want, while among the most intimate associates of the future George IV is numbered Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the son of an actor. In fact one of the most striking features of eighteenth century society was the welcome that was extended, in the most exclusive circles, not only to genius, but to outstanding personality.

Take the instance of Beau Nash, who exercised something like a dictatorship over the brilliant society that came to take the waters at Bath. Of obscure, middle-class origin, this man achieved his position by the sheer fact of his social usefulness. He was a born organizer—and Bath society was in crying need of organization. In all sorts of ways he brought civilization and order into what had been a social bear-garden. Not even the greatest in the land were exempt from his authority; he made nothing of rebuking a Princess or, with his own hands, of depriving a Duchess of a white

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apron with which she had had the bad taste to enter the Assembly Rooms, and tossing it to the servants. He was even, like Sir Charles Grandison, able to mitigate the curse of duelling, and to prevent gentlemen from coming to social functions wearing swords.

And yet most people today would be inclined to put down the Beau as even less of a gentleman by nature than he was by birth. He had all that self-assertive exuberance of vital energy that we are accustomed to associate with the word "bounder." He made a positive speciality of impudence, often of the crudest order, as when, for once, he caught a Tartar from a young lady, whom he had tried to put out of countenance by asking the name of Tobit's dog, and who had silenced him with, "His name was Nash, and an impudent dog he was!" His most celebrated feats, accomplished for bets, were in the way of sheer exhibitionism; as when he rode through a village naked on a cow, or stood at the door of York Minister, after service, wrapped only in a blanket. Certainly nothing recorded about Nash could induce us to credit him with that witty urbanity and lightness of touch so characteristic of French society. And the mere fact of his obtaining such a dominance in his own country, shows how very much behind English Society must have been in those graces, to which Chesterfield was always imploring his son to sacrifice. No doubt there was a good sprinkling of the Squire Western breed even in Bath.

There is another feature of English society that cannot have been conducive to that polish which is the completion of good manners. It was, to a far larger extent than that of France, dominated by masculine influence. Before the middle of the eighteenth century,

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there was nothing corresponding, in England, to the *salons*. Their place was filled by such purely masculine associations as those of the coffee house, and the club. After 1750, a notable effort was made to supply the deficiency; a hostess of genius, Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, was so successful in forming a highly intellectualized society of both sexes, that she became known as the English Madame du Deffand, and her example was followed by several other ladies of her set. The women, many of them brilliantly gifted, who took part in this movement, were known as blue-stockings, an epithet believed to have been applied to them, first, in derision, by the husband of one of them, Admiral Boscawen, a hard-bitten old sea-dog who had scant sympathy with such goings on.

The blue-stockings, however, were a notable addition to the forces that were battling to rescue English society from boorishness. At Mrs. Montagu's gatherings, the perpetual card-playing that consumed so much of the time and money of fashionable people, was put under a ban; conversation and not play was the entertainment provided. More congenial to the English nature than the conversational set-pieces of the salon, was the intimacy of the dinner party, at which the guests would be selected and arranged with meticulous forethought. We even read of a club being formed, by several fashionable ladies, at Almack's, to include members of both sexes.

On the whole, we may conclude that the manners of an English gentleman were notably on the up grade during the greater part of the eighteenth century; so long, in fact, as the civilizing influence from across the Channel continued to operate. The age of enormous



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wigs had been marked by a great deal of boorishness and brutality, that was at least mitigated in that of powder and bows. Such episodes as that of Lord Cobham spitting into Lord Hervey's hat, when he held it out with a flourish, would have been hardly credible in the reign of George III—at any rate among people occupying a similar position in society. And the gangs of aristocratic hooligans, known as Mohocks, who had practiced torture and outrage on inoffensive passers by of both sexes, early in the century, had, long before its close, faded almost out of memory.

Even in the country, we have the best evidence of how much the civilizing influence had filtered through, at any rate to the larger mansions. Mr. Hastings' library had, we know, consisted of two books; but few gentlemen of Mr. Hastings' standing, during the second half of the eighteenth century, would have been unprovided with one of those magnificent libraries whose unsold relics, in their mellow calf bindings, still remain part of the furniture—the cream of available literature, not only English, but French, Italian, Latin and Greek. More likely than not these would be supplemented by works of art picked up, at incredible bargain prices, on the Continent, or family portraits by Sir Joshua, or Gainsborough, or — before them — by Hudson or Richardson or some other of that God's plenty of English portraitists. Or there might be rich collections of china, as at Penshurst, or of tapestries, as at Cobham in Kent.

By their fruits we shall know them, and the mere presence of these things, and the evident desire for them, is proof positive that the Beefs and Westerns were not having it all their own way, even in provincial

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life. Civilization was fighting a winning battle for the soul, or manners, of the English gentleman. And then, one September day, happened an event whose catastrophic import was little suspected. A vast mob, headed by the self-mobilized viragoes of Paris, came swarming up the road to Versailles; it returned in triumph, leading its sovereign captive. And from thenceforward Versailles, except as an empty shell, and a museum, ceased to exist.

The effect of that on English Society might be compared to the darkening of a town, when the distant power station, from which its current is derived, ceases to function.

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BUT perhaps the event was only catastrophic, in the sense of precipitating a change that was already more than half accomplished. No phase of European civilization, however deliberately contrived, has found the Egyptian secret of stabilizing itself over vast periods of time. All was in a state of flux or—as we should put it today—of evolution. The aristocratic order of society whose prime object was the escape from *ennui*, ended by getting bored with itself. The cultivated discipline of the emotions, the well bred assumption of superiority to nature, were no sooner achieved than they were felt to be intolerable. Aristocratic culture signed its own death-warrant, when it encouraged the person and ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau, who, from its own point of view, incarnated everything that was low and ungentlemanly—the man of pure, or impure, nature, who went about everywhere uncovering his own shame, and exhibiting himself in a state of obscene emotional nudity, inciting all who would accept his apostleship to go and do likewise.

That gospel of nature left no room for the cult of an exclusive gentility determined by blood alone. Once you have ceased to admit that the supreme achievement of civilization is the breeding of aristocrats, the aristocrat has ceased to justify his existence, and the logical French mind will not stop short of the inevitable conclusion—that of the guillotine.

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Even if the English mind had been in the same habit of following ideas to conclusions, no such necessity would have arisen on its side of the Channel. In the French sense, in which the word gentleman signifies a minor aristocrat, there was no such person in England to guillotine. She had reacted in various ways to the Versailles influence, but there had never been any question of her setting up the French system, or—for that matter—the French gentleman, in spite of one or two very plausible imitations.

The English gentleman, as we have seen, was a less specialized product than his counterpart. Instead of being the embodiment of one consistent ideal, he was the battle ground of contending influences of a partially imported urbanity and his own inherited provincialism. On the whole, the urbanity had been in the ascendant. But now that it was cut off from its main source, the balance had become decisively tilted in the other direction. No doubt a cultured garrison had had time to establish itself in English soil, and might be supposed capable of maintaining its own tradition. But it was cut off from support; and the mere fact of its being English caused to develop, within its own ranks, whatever tendency to provincialism and eccentricity may be inherent in the English nature.

This may even be counted for good, in so far as it is good for the ideal of a gentleman to evolve freely on its own native lines. For the swing back to nature was a thing peculiarly congenial to English nature, which never takes kindly to a centralized or academic discipline. The Versailles pattern was, after all—a pattern. Concentricity was its essence. The gentleman of France wore his gentility like an invisible uniform: his very

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mood was prescribed for him; his love-making was a minuet, in which all the steps and motions are part of an accepted convention, and whose whole merit consists in the exquisite grace of their performance. The French tended, in fact, to differ from the English gentleman in the same way as French from English poetry. The one was as precise and well ordered as a formal garden amid its clipped hedges; everything was restrained, foreseen, a matter of exact planning; whereas the other was as exuberant as a May hedgerow or woodland clearing, no contrivance of man, but God's plenty. But about God's plenty, there is always the danger that things rank and gross in nature may end by possessing it.

The French Revolution was revolutionary almost from the first, in its effect on the gentlemen of England, which was really more profound than upon that French upper class, whom it ruined materially, but whose spirit, like that of their ruling house, it altered little. Even those advanced spirits who at first were inclined to wax jubilant at what they fondly imagined to be the triumph of English constitutional principles, were as hostile—or more so than the crustiest Tory—to all that France had stood for *before* the Revolution. Thus we find Charles James Fox, the chief of these mostly plutocratic friends of liberty, defying all the conventions by coming into the House of Commons not in silk stockings, but top-boots—dressed anyhow in fact, which is just what Fox, who was not only slovenly, but positively dirty, had probably always longed to do.<sup>1</sup> Very soon the powdered hair went the same way as

<sup>1</sup> See Fischel and Boehn, *Modes and Manners of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. I, p. xiii of the English Edition.

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the stockings, and the beginnings of the top hat—a Jacobin importation—made their appearance.

But susceptibility of any kind to French influence was a vanishing factor. The whole upper class of England was not unnaturally shocked, and alarmed to the very depths of its being, by the utter ruin that had overwhelmed its counterpart across the Channel; and then on the top of this, England was plunged into a struggle, for her very life, against a more terrible France than she had known or dreamed of in the days of her former wars, a struggle that went on, almost without intermission, for little less than a generation. Even if there had been any French culture in being more worthy of respect than the blatant vulgarity of the Empire style, nobody in England would have dreamed of imitating it. It was the merest matter of course for Nelson to burst forth with—"I hate, hate, hate, the French!" But how far had England travelled from the spirit of Marlborough and of Wolfe, that it had become possible for an officer and a gentleman to indulge in sentiments of that kind!

These were no idle outpourings. The English gentry, entrenched in their country estates, were not only strong enough to maintain their own position intact, but also to wear down the utmost force of French imperialism. There is, in one of Ibsen's earlier plays, a sort of impalpable monster who conquers all opponents by sheer inertia—they strike, and he snores, until they drop exhausted and are overwhelmed. Just so the English gentry, who ran the government of the country, met the vast, imaginative schemes of an enemy who made the Continent his footstool, by what amounted to a tactic of sheer indifference. They

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declined to be in the least degree excited, or put out of their ordinary stride. Except for those of their sons who adopted a military or naval career, they made no great change in their way of life. At the worst crisis of the war, a championship fight in the ring could arouse more interest than a battle in the Peninsula. It was not only business, but pleasure as usual—what reader of Jane Austen would ever suspect that there was a war on in her time?

That spirit behind the protection of an invincible sea power, and with the help of a new manufacturing power, was no doubt effective in getting Napoleon to St. Helena. But that it was equally effective in improving the breed of English gentlemen, is a more disputable proposition.

What it did undoubtedly accomplish was its insulation, to an extent undreamed of since the Conquest. The squire was thoroughly convinced that his was the best possible way of life, in the best of all possible islands; that he had nothing to learn from foreigners, and least of all, from Frenchmen. His way of life had gloriously vindicated itself. What pleased him as much as any victory was the fact that, while Massena's great army was starving outside the lines of Torres Vedras, Viscount Wellington was enjoying excellent sport, with a pack of English hounds, behind them. Indeed, in his greatest victories, the "Beau," as he was called, handled his troops rather in the way a good master manages his pack.

But we are not to imagine that the severance from France resulted in a swift and sensational barbarization, in which the whole body of the gentry reverted suddenly to the pattern of Squire Western. We must

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remember that the upper class had by that time attained a level of culture considerably above the average of Fielding's day. Even foxhunters were by no means all boors. One might cite the instance of Peter Beckford—not to be confused with his Cousin William of Fonthill—who not only hunted his own hounds, but wrote, in excellent prose, what is still a classic of the sport, with an introduction on hare hunting among the Greeks. This same Peter was a great traveller on the Continent and recorded his impressions in two volumes of Familiar Letters; and so discriminating a patron of music was he, that he brought back to England, in order to give him a start, the musician Clementi.<sup>1</sup>

But we must note the significant fact of this cultivated foxhunter having acquired what was probably the most valuable part of his education on the Continent. How long would such standards be maintained, when the Grand Tour had become a thing of the past, and England was driven back upon her own mental resources?

Certainly there was no danger of her failing through any lack of confidence in her own ability. In these great days she felt equal to anything, from licking to lecturing all comers. Not only was she capable of laying down the law to the whole world but—what she valued a great deal more—of being a law unto herself; and this, in practice, came not far short of the individual Englishman becoming a law unto himself. Instead of disciplining his emotions so as to produce perfect conformity to a system, he gladly embraced the new tendency of the age, which was to

<sup>1</sup> See Beckford's recent Life by A. H. Higginson.



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give them all the scope possible. Back to nature—and the more natural the better! Not only he—but to an even more marked extent, she!

What conflict of spirit was going on just after the turn of the century, we can best realize from the novels of Jane Austen, of which it is the main theme, perfectly defined in the title of her first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility*. This extraordinary little woman, born and bred in the very depths of the English countryside, and never stirring abroad from the quiet parsonage that was her home, except for an occasional visit, had yet, perhaps, more in her of the authentic Parisian spirit than any of her contemporaries. For what she meant by "sense" was precisely that quality of controlled and urbane reasonableness, that was the very essence of the French, eighteenth century notion of breeding. What was most distinctively English about her conception of it, was a certain sweet amiability—an outlook that is humorous, rather than witty, and regards the opposite party, the people of sensibility, with a kindly affection that has not the least tang of irony.

You feel that if there was anything calculated to try Miss Austen's patience, or to get on her nerves, it was the running eyes, the heaving bosoms, and the extravagant silliness of these people of the new school, who made such a duty of stoking up their emotions. She sees through them so clearly, and she can never look without the corners of her mouth relaxing in a smile; but it is a smile that communicates its own kindness to the reader. There are no two more lovable characters in fiction than Marianne Dashwood, who breaks her romantic heart over just the sort of plausible young

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scamp that "sense" would have taught her to avoid; or than that most delightful of *ingenues*, Catherine Morland, whose head is so stuffed with the then fashionable type of romantic thriller, that she actually comes to believe that her prosaic and most unpleasant host, at Northanger Abbey, has either murdered his former wife, or is keeping her alive in a dungeon! And yet how many male readers have not fallen as irresistibly in love with her as that supreme embodiment of good sense, that elegant young priest of the world, the Reverend Henry Tilney!

Sense and sensibility—is it not as if we had uttered the names of the two great heroes of the time, Wellington and Nelson! The sailor, though by eleven years the senior of the two, was the type of the new age, with his unrestrained emotional incontinence, his extravagant sensibility. Passion, like wisdom, is justified of her children, and sensibility may have had as much to do with the brilliance of the Nile, as sense with the tactical artistry of Waterloo. But it is difficult to imagine Nelson turning his hand to diplomacy, and combining the judgment of the statesman with the tact of the courtier, like Wellington, and like Marlborough before him. For Wellington was as different as possible from the rough and laconic Iron Duke of popular legend; he was, in fact, almost as accomplished a man of the eighteenth century tradition as Chesterfield himself, a ready and fluent talker, with just that quality of emotional astringency that had been prized in the *salons*; it was thoroughly in that tradition for him to have said, in reference to that most appalling tragedy of modern times, the Black Famine of Ireland, "It was rotten potatoes put Peel (the Prime Minister) in

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his damned fright"; or to have replied to Lord Uxbridge's laconic announcement, "By God, my leg's shot off!" with an equally laconic "By God, so it is!" We may be very certain what he would *not* have said, if he had got his quietus from that same ball—and that is, "Kiss me, Uxbridge!"

Wellington had come to be typical of the old school, even at the time of Waterloo, though the fact that he could shed tears both after that battle, and Badajoz, shows him to have had a great deal more sensibility than would be conceivable in a modern general. But that rigid emotional discipline he had imposed upon himself ever since, as a boy, he had broken himself of what was probably his natural bent as a musician, was not at all to the taste of the ordinary English gentleman. Now that the authority of the Versailles tradition was shattered, there was no longer any incentive to conform to pattern. Accordingly we find individualism running riot, every man doing that which is right in his own eyes, and following the dictates of his own passion.

It was the age of eccentrics. The exploits of these human freaks have furnished the theme of a delightful book by Miss Edith Sitwell, but she has naturally only been able to cull a few outstanding blossoms from a vast field, or rather wilderness. But it would be a mistake to regard the eccentric as a freak, and nothing else. We might say that he is merely carrying out a particular philosophy, that of the freedom of the individual carried to its utmost possible extent. There was a certain Mr. Hirst, for example, who was outraged at the way in which horses were taxed. Very well, then—he would defeat the exchequer by hunting and shooting

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on bull-back. On the same principle, a certain Mr. Shelley, who happened to be not a sportsman, but a poet, and had gone for a bathe in the most convenient costume—which was nature's—returned to his room by the shortest route, which happened to pass through another room wherein a mixed company were dining.

For genius, uncontrolled, breeds eccentricity on an heroic scale. This was conspicuously the case with Lord Byron, the motive of whose whole career was a determination to break through every sort of constraint or convention, one that he set about executing with all the arrogance of a liberty-loving aristocrat. His drinking out of a skull, and the sort of Hell-Fire Club over which, as a very young man, he presided at Newstead, were merely symbolic of his lifelong pursuit of a freedom that—being not only an eccentric but a genius—he sought for others as well as himself:

Still freedom, still, thy banner torn and flying  
Streams, like a thunder cloud, *against* the wind!

the wind being whatever threatens constraint or restraint to the free spirit of man. Against that Byron himself thundered till he shook Europe; in that cause he endured banishment, obloquy, and, at last, death.

This rampant and superb individualism was characteristic of the British gentleman of this time, and also, by no means infrequently, of the British lady. What other age would have endured such a spurner of all conventions as Caroline, wife of the William Lambé who afterwards became Lord Melbourne, with her unrestrained and importunate passion for Byron, alternating with such resentment as caused her to make a bonfire of his image in wax, while the village girls,

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provided with white robes for the purpose, danced round the pyre under supervision of the enchantress. Or of Clare Clairmont, that extremely emancipated young lady who entered into a not unfruitful correspondence with Byron with a view to becoming his mistress.

There seemed no lengths to which the English gentleman or lady were incapable of going, in the expansion of their personalities. Lord Frederic North, who, like Byron, had a generous sympathy for the cause of oppressed Greece, could find no better way of expressing it than by wrapping himself in a purple robe, binding a red band about his hair, and calling upon the astonished Greeks to recognize him as Plato. Lady Hester Stanhope went even further than this, when she assumed the airs and state of an Oriental princess in the Lebanon, and not only a princess, but a prophetess—the herald and companion of a shortly expected Messiah!

But eccentricity, when it passes all bounds, will not be kept within those of culture. Men like Shelley and Byron were exploiting the heritage of an established tradition; Byron had actually convinced himself that he was a poetic reactionary from the new-fangled romantic cult, to the formal correctness of Pope and the eighteenth century; and Shelley, besides being a classical scholar, derived his philosophy from the pre-Revolutionary trend of the French "Enlightenment." But now that the foreign influence is so decisively weakened, the eccentric pull, like that of a planet, whose sun has been disintegrated in some cosmic catastrophe, drags it out of its orbit into the chill and lightless depths of space. There were eccentrics of genius, giants drunken with the new wine of romance

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and freedom; but it was only so long as the centripetal balanced the centrifugal, or—in the phrase of the time—the classical the romantic impulse, that genius could be fruitful of anything except eccentricity.

And thus we find that with the coming of a new generation, to whom the French influence is one of sheer repulsion, and to whom the glories of the old regime are not even a memory, the English upper or landed class—the two are still nearly equivalent—becomes gradually de-intellectualized. There is no loss of energy—rather the reverse—but energy, without brain to guide it, runs to muscle.

The nucleus of culture that had formed during the eighteenth century, and had begun to diffuse such an influence by the end of its ninth decade, no longer was able to hold together. The Chesterfields, the Horace Walpoles, left no successors—their very tradition was discredited. From every department of intellectual or creative activity, the gentleman of the old school was being ousted by intruders from the all-conquering middle class, which threatened to absorb the brains even faster than the wealth of the country. And these intruders were themselves mostly individualists, each playing strenuously for his own hand, and without any idea of re-integrating that lost nucleus of culture.

We must not write as if there had been any sudden or sensational catastrophe. Upper class life shows little obvious change from year to year; its splendour, its gaiety, are as conspicuous as ever. What has died out of it is something that is not missed; and that, even if it were, would not be regretted. The time was coming, of which its most distinguished critic would be able to lump the whole of that class together under the

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comprehensive designation of Barbarians; and the process of barbarization had been continuous since the Revolution. If one could take any date as marking its definite ascendancy, it would be that of Byron's death in 1824. But about a process so gradual, there is really no definition. Right up to the time when Queen Victoria was on the throne, there was an attempt to keep alive the *salon* spirit in Holland House, to which a cultured host, and an imperious hostess, managed to attract almost everyone with a reputation for brilliance. But this was, at the best, the last flicker of an almost extinguished fire.

Meanwhile the English gentry, thrown on their own resources, rather resembled the inhabitants of Britain after the Roman garrison had been withdrawn. Barbarism came seeping back, from the outer fringe, till all was submerged. There was no leadership, no acknowledged standard. It would have been a golden opportunity for an enlightened Prince or Sovereign to have made his court what a court should be, the pattern of civilized intercourse. But there was no hope of this under Georgian auspices. George III was a worthy man and a patriot, but he had no more idea than any ordinary farmer of sacrificing to the graces. And as for his heir, George IV, he, like his numerous brothers, was, beneath all the brave show he made as Prince of Wales, thoroughly coarse-grained, and as different from Charles II, to whom he is sometimes likened, as heavy Teutonic can be from light French.

The set that the Prince gathered round him, at Carlton House and the Brighton Pavilion, presented the spectacle of court life run to anarchy. There were no doubt brilliant men among them—Fox, for example,

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and Sheridan—while nearly all of them were in one way or another gifted with personality. Even the Prince himself was the inheritor, if not the sustainer, of a great cultural tradition—witness his query about some one, “Is he a gentleman? Has he any Greek?” hardly a test that one can imagine being applied by twentieth century Royalty.

But how futile it all is! How like power running to waste for want of control! The first gentleman in Europe—and the Prince looked and dressed the part—went rushing through life from one time-killing distraction to another, drowning thought with perpetual refills of strong liquor, carrying his steadily expanding form from table to table, and bed to bed. And his brothers, those rumbustious specimens of what modern slang has christened the He-man—not one of them without some kink of incurable absurdity, and yet men enough to make even their foibles attractive to a generation whose figureheads are too correctly standardized for eccentricity!

The facile cry of “What a set!” that rises to the lips when we contemplate this entourage of Prinny—as they called him—might be more to the point if we were to say “What a set it might have been, with other outlets for its energies!” What might not more humane environment have made of the great Beau Brummell, to whom we can hardly deny the name of genius—though a genius of clothes. A genius, moreover, of the purest eighteenth century tradition, for the Beau’s ideal of sartorial perfection was one, not of self assertion, but a genteel reserve. Of the well-dressed man, not only is a studiously undemonstrative appropriateness required, but also—which is where Brummell was ahead



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of his time—an immaculate cleanliness. The self-respect of a gentleman that made him demand spotless linen—and that not only in the parts where it could be seen—was nobly sane, and would have fitted into the philosophy of a Chesterfield. Only with the Beau it did not fit into anything; it was his whole philosophy of life. There was one gospel, even that of clothes, and George Brummell was its prophet. It is no wonder that he ended his career frankly and hopelessly mad.

Or take the wicked Lord Hertford, whose exploits in the field of sex caused him to be pilloried as an awful example by Thackeray, in the character of Lord Steyne, in *Vanity Fair*. Fortunately this is not the only portrait we have of his Lordship, for Disraeli, who was more concerned with holding up the mirror to life than the scourge to vice, drew him as the Lord Monmouth of his *Coningsby*, a frankly fascinating old man of the world, whose grand and genial manners are unmarred by that morbid necessity to indulge one particular craving. And one thinks, to what heights might not Lord Monmouth, or Hertford, have risen, in a completely sane—which is after all the best form of a cultured—environment.

Or again, where could you find a more conspicuous instance of culture run to waste than that of William Beckford, whose genius had the rare backing of a fabulous fortune, and who wrote an Oriental romance, which is still a literary classic, in French, and, by his own account, at a single sitting. But instead of going on to fresh triumphs of the pen, he must needs devote all his energy and fortune to rushing up the most extraordinary monstrosity of sham Gothic that even such a time could misbeget. So flimsy was the thing

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that the central tower, 300 feet high, came promptly toppling down like a card-house; but another was run up on foundations only a shade less flimsy. No sooner was this palace—or rather abbey—completed, and shut off from the world by a forbiddingly high wall, than Beckford proceeded to immure himself therein like a millionaire hermit, surrounded by books, curios, and mystery, until at last even his fortune had been so far dissipated as to make it necessary for him to dispose of the house for what it would fetch; not long before a second collapse of the tower dissolved the abbey into a ruin.

Here was a man brought up in the pre-revolutionary tradition; who had done the Grand Tour, and acquired not only the breeding but the very tongue of a Versailles courtier. But once that source of inspiration is cut off, we find him like a man lost, or a ship without a rudder; he gets nowhere. And if even such advantages could not avail, what chance, in this cultural anarchy, would there be for those who had been born and bred in it?

It might easily have been predicted that in the absence of any counterbalancing influence, Squire Western and his ideals would come into their own again. The owners of country estates would no longer be visited by dreams of Cicero's villa at Tusculum, nor erect temples in their grounds to gods that had ceased to command belief. Such amiable pedantries would take time and money away from the real pleasures of a gentleman. Elegant they may have been, but they were not manly, and to achieve manliness was now the summit of every gentleman's ambition. It is a word that crops up everywhere in the writings

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of the time, and one almost gathers that the quality it denotes was believed to have been monopolized by John Bull, and to have set the seal on his superiority to all foreigners. Nor did the manly Englishman think any the worse of himself for being above the airs and graces cultivated among themselves by these unmanlier breeds.

The development of eccentricity, or ungoverned individualism among the English gentry, is worth rather closer study than it has received. For, viewed in perspective, even this denial of all order will be seen to have an order and progression of its own—or rather, one might say, a deterioration. For, taking the French Revolution as a starting point, we might say that for about the space of a generation, we have a time rich with eccentrics of culture, and even of such genius as to make us forget their eccentricity. It is difficult for us to realize nowadays how much the education of a gentleman—even apart from the Grand Tour—did actually succeed in instilling. We look back with horror on the methods of the old schoolmasters, who appointed long excerpts from the classics to be construed or learnt by heart, and swished an implacable birch, unless and until the task was duly completed. We have changed all that, and when we teach the classics at all, we do it scientifically and without tears. Only the fact, the unedifying and immoral fact, remains, that a modern public school education imparts a more lasting knowledge of dirty Limericks, than of all the classical authors from Homer to Juvenal, who are known only as the Untouchable is known to the Brahman; whereas the gentleman, well on into the nineteenth century, really did carry something of the classics in his head, by

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whatever route they may have been driven in. I have already cited George IV's identification of a gentleman with one who has Greek, just in such a matter of course way as nowadays one might expect a gentleman to have clean finger nails. George was probably aware of how his friend, Charles James Fox, having gambled away his last sixpence at the card table, went home, not, as his friends feared, to put a bullet through his skull, but to bury himself in Herodotus.

Fox, however, was more or less compelled to "have Greek," to have the least hope of a career in a House of Commons where classical allusion was the commonest form of rhetorical ornament. But it is much more remarkable when we find the most out and out barbarians of the countryside spouting Attic like any don, For what more unashamed barbarian was there than the famous Squire Mytton, who had been expelled from two public schools, had thrashed his private tutor, and refused either to open a book or matriculate at the university, and whose whole subsequent life was a breakneck gallop to ruin. And yet, when that ruin had been fairly accomplished, when fortune, family and health had left him, and sanity rocked, his biographer can record of him that he would quote Greek and Latin authors with surprising readiness, applying to his own case the passage from Sophocles, wherein Oedipus recommends his children to the care of Creon, as well as constantly repeating some appropriate epigram from the Greek anthology. Of how many modern public school products, even the most exemplary, would such an effort be conceivable?

Mytton is a pathetic witness to the strength of that culture, that he, and his kind, were working with deadly

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success to eliminate from the very idea of an English gentleman. For, in spite of those few good seeds that had so incongruously struck root in him, he represents that second type of eccentric or individualist whose spirits are merely animal, and who has no more use for brains than a beast of prey in quest of his next meal.

It is not as if sport had ever been ruled out of a gentleman's activities, even in the palmiest days of the eighteenth century. The Kings of France had been enthusiastic—perhaps too enthusiastic—hunters. But, at any rate in the most enlightened circles, there had been no question but that sport was made for man, and not man for sport. The man of breeding, however pagan, had thought more nobly of life than to bind down his ambition to so primitive a level.

But in nineteenth century England, all this was changed. More and more it came to be assumed, though perhaps not explicitly formulated, that a gentleman's first duty is to be manly, and that to be manly is the same thing as to be sporting. And indeed, in process of time, the very word manly was superseded, and the highest compliment you could pay to anyone was to call him a sportsman—or, later still, a "sport."

There was a wide choice of lines from which a gentleman might choose at the beginning of the nineteenth century for the expression of his personality; he might, like Cochrane, achieve fantastic triumphs with distant navies in distant seas; or, as Rajah Brooke did in Sarawak and Byron might have done in Greece, found his own dynasty; or, like Trelawny, ride the Aegean under the Hellenic equivalent of the Jolly Roger; he might achieve a revolution in lyric poetry or attempt one in architecture; all the kingdoms of the world and the

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mind lay open before him. Bliss indeed was it in such a dawn to be alive and rich. But, as time went on, the gentlemen of England showed less and less desire to exercise such privilege of choice. It is as we may chance to find, on leaving some main junction, all the lines running together and narrowing down to one single track. The eccentrics of culture are a disappearing breed; the age of the great sporting characters has set in. It is no longer "Is he a gentleman, has he any Greek?" but rather, "has he bagged anything?"

This is why this same Squire Mytton has come to be a symbolic figure. For there was about the man at least the potentiality of greatness. Napoleon himself had not so devastating an energy; that which impelled Mytton to swim his horse over the Severn, and to lie in the snow, in ambush for duck, clad only in a night-shirt, might, guided into other channels, have flung armies, like thunderbolts, across the rivers of Europe; might have braved, and perhaps conquered, the terrors of a Russian winter. But it had no outlet save in the war against game and vermin, save in incredible feats of muscular prowess and foolhardy daring; until it turned inward, and consumed the man himself, and all that was his.

In some Victorian book, whose name I have long forgotten, is what seems to me a very plausible account of Hell; the idea being that the slaves of this world's pleasures, so far from being deprived of them, are damned to an everlasting surfeit of a lust, which like fire, burns all the more fiercely from being perpetually replenished with fuel. Just such a Hell was this of poor Jack Mytton. Born with every advantage that wealth and family prestige can confer, he tore through life

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like a maniac possessed of devils, vainly endeavouring to escape from an agony that was unescapable, because it was in his own breast.

He must have quite literally burnt up the tissues of an abnormally sturdy frame by saturating them with alcohol—six daily bottles of port for a foundation, and heroic potations of brandy; he would be driven home at night, at a breakneck gallop, in his coach and four, with hundreds of pounds in notes loose on the seat, and fluttering out of the window all along the way; he would charge his tandem at a turnpike gate, would drive his gig deliberately into a gatepost at full gallop, lie down with his head between the hind legs of a nervous thoroughbred, ride into his own dining room on a bear and then spurn the poor beast into biting him, and as the climax of innumerable similar feats, burn himself alive, and almost to death, by deliberately setting fire to his own shirt—no great matter, perhaps, for one who had been consumed for so long with a fire within.

Old Jack Mytton, still remembered with a sort of affectionate pride in his native Shropshire as a sportsman and gentleman of the purest breed! And yet, when we examine his record—what a gentleman! If we were to meet such a man today, we should probably be more inclined to describe him as a cad of the first water, a bully and a sadist. How else can we account for his treatment of his two unfortunate wives, each of whom he loved after his furious fashion, yet each of whose lives his possessing demons impelled him to reduce to as great a hell as his own; one of whom found refuge from him in the grave, and the other by taking herself and her child off, after some final un-named, but unforgivable, affront, to the shelter of her parents' house.

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What shall we say of the brutal practical jokes which, to be sure, were a recognized contemporary medium for the display of genteel manliness, but with Mytton did not stop short of dressing up as the devil in order to terrify a sick old man in bed, or setting the wire of a spring gun in the path, serviceward, of his private chaplain, and then rushing out to accuse him of shooting pheasants—the unfortunate butt of this, and similar pleasantries being, as Mytton well knew, in no position to retaliate.

It is just the invisible halo that still surrounds the memory of Mytton that makes him historically significant. If his case had been merely one of such borderline insanity as will crop up from time to time in any environment, it would be best forgotten. But there is nothing accidental about Mytton. He is, by general consent, one of the great sporting characters of an age singularly prolific of them—perhaps the greatest and most representative of them all. For so far from constituting an exception, he contrived, with that streak of misapplied genius, to be the consummate fulfiller of the rule—the sportsman absolute, to whom sport is really the end of existence.

And to this end the landed gentry of England, still by tradition the upper class *par excellence*, were more and more tending to become specialized. The country scene is dominated by the red coat of the fox-hunter; the prints of the time have made us only too familiar with the stolid, expressionless faces of these men in whiskers, with their horses' legs extended rigidly fore and aft in a way that would land the animal, the next second, hopelessly spread-eagled. The concentrated manliness of their proceedings is emphasized by the gloating way



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in which two or three hair-raising catastrophes are introduced into any average picture of a run, so that one begins to wonder at the modesty of the estimate of hunting as the image of war, with only twenty-five per cent of its danger.

But hunting was only one phase, and perhaps the most popular and innocuous, of the sporting gentleman's activities. There was shooting, which took the form of a frankly anti-social tyranny, enforced by savage game laws, administered by their own beneficiaries, the county landowners. It is to be noted that up to 1831, no one was qualified to kill game, unless he had at least £100 a year in freehold or £150 in leasehold property; while a walk in a country wood might quite easily end with a leg crushed between the teeth of a steel trap, or a charge of shot in one's body from a spring gun.

Then of course there was racing, which provided scope for more bad characters and sharp practice than any other legitimate form of activity. Not even the Prince of Wales could submit a pair of indubitably clean hands to the scrutiny of the Jockey Club. Nothing, in fact, could have been wider of the mark, in those palmy days, than the sentimental notion of the sporting spirit as one of frank and generous chivalry. Sport was infected through and through with the virus of gambling; hardly any form of contest or competition between gentlemen was thought worth while unless there was a pretty heavy pecuniary stake involved. Even cricket matches were played for upwards of a thousand guineas a side, and played in consequence with all the keenness of a transaction between Shylock and Tubal.

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Let us take one instance, that of a single wicket match arranged by Squire Osbaldeston, almost as famous a sporting character as Mytton, between himself and Lord Frederick Beauclerc, each with one partner. As it happened, the Squire was taken badly ill before the match, and begged for it to be postponed. But postponement not being nominated in the bond, his Lordship insisted that it should be either play or pay. And play it accordingly was, the Squire being driven from his bed down to the ground, just able to walk or stagger a solitary run—and even then Lord Frederick successfully contested his request for a fieldsman substitute. It is gratifying to record that this noble sportsman got beaten after all, thanks to the practically unaided efforts of the Squire's partner George Lambert.

Osbaldeston is usually taken for the type of all that a sportsman and a gentleman ought to be, and yet even he was mixed up in at least one uncommonly fishy transaction on the turf. This involved him in a duel with Lord George Bentinck, off whom he had taken £200 by backing one of his own horses for a race in which, as he himself records, not without pride, he had secured a light handicap by previous deliberate pulling. For this manoeuvre Lord George had not unjustly taxed him with impudent robbery—and the Squire, who, having pocketed the money, promptly challenged the payer, had some difficulty in getting anyone to act as his second. Indeed there is some reason to suspect that the seconds succeeded in averting what would have been sheer murder—for the Squire was a dead shot—by loading surreptitiously with blank.

And talking of dead shots, it may not be out of place to quote a casual tribute paid by the Squire, in his

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very revealing autobiography, to another of these sporting heroes, Captain Horatio Ross. "He was a wonderful shot with a pistol; he used to amuse himself occasionally at Melton by shooting the cats on the tops of the houses."

Truly there were mighty hunters and sportsmen in those days—but gentleness, chivalry, manners, culture, and the other attributes of a gentleman . . . one asks, what has become of them? Or shall we talk of the meekest men and the gentlest that ever pulled horse, or shot cat on roof? One knows—and certainly no Englishman needs to be reminded of it—what real benefits have accrued from sport, and how, even in spite of its abuses, it has served as a bond of social union. It is more healthy, if not indisputably more rational, to make a hero of a Beef than of a dictator. But one is tempted to take a leaf out of James I's book, and say: "Hero, if you will—but God Almighty could not make either the one or the other into a gentleman!"

However we must take English nature as we find it, and there is food for reflection in the sign, conspicuous on the Holyhead Road, where it crosses the Severn, of the *Mytton and Mermaid*. One would have to travel far indeed on the roads of Sussex, before coming upon a *Shelley and Skylark*.

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VICTORIANS*

HISTORICALLY, it is most convenient to speak of the Victorian Age as covering the four mid decades of the nineteenth century, with the last three counting as Late Victorian. For our purpose, the dominating feature of the Victorian Age, thus reckoned, is that the English mind has become gentleman conscious, in a way that it has never been before. Hitherto the word gentleman, though freely employed, has served only to a very minor degree as what psychologists would call a reaction stimulus. The gentleman was an accepted fact of the social system, but not a fact that anybody would get particularly excited or sentimental about, still less one the very name of which was to be breathed with a certain embarrassment. In the Victorian Age it became all these things. Like the word God, it was a powerful, but very dangerous, conversational lead, and you needed to be sure indeed of your ground, and audience, before risking it.

The difficulty was enhanced by the fact that the reaction, though certainly intense, was anything but simple. The sound of gentleman, it would seem, had a double effect on the recipient's brain. Forces of attraction and repulsion would be released simultaneously, and it was even betting which would get the mastery. Your Victorian might hurl manly defiance at the very idea of a gentleman, or bow down and worship before his image; he might glory openly in

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not being, or furtively in claiming to be, or know, one. Both attitudes are equally characteristic of the country, the time, and often of the same person.

When we talk of the mentality of an age, we naturally mean that which is dominant, and by which its most significant actions are determined. In those years, spreading between the early thirties and the late sixties, the only mind that counts is that of the great middle class, to which the first Reform Bill had transferred the effective sovereignty of the country. Almost all of the great achievements by which that time is remembered, are those of men and women who, on the one hand, are without ancestral estates or pedigrees, and, on the other, are above the necessity of toiling with their hands for a wage. The violent tilting of the balance of social power that was the first effect of a mechanized and capitalized industry, had given a new importance to the men who could make, or whose parents had made, the money that came so quickly for the winners in a cut-throat competition of all against all. To avoid the ruin and bankruptcy that were a great deal more on the cards than a fortune, such men had to be as ruthless with themselves as with their rivals; to have all their faculties sharpened to the finest point, and to work themselves as mercilessly as they did their employees. Thereto they were disciplined by the cult of an even more ruthless and pleasure-hating Taskmaster whom they entitled "the Lord." And when chance or inheritance permitted, they brought to science, to art, and to letters—all of which they practically monopolized so far as any significant work is concerned—that same concentrated efficiency and energy of the economic man on the make.

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But the traditional holders of power, the old landed gentry, regarded these changes—when they regarded them at all—with their habitual phlegm. Something, it seemed, was happening beyond their park walls of a vaguely unpleasant nature. Something even more unpleasant seemed likely to eventuate in the near future; the whole country going to the dogs, aristocrats guillotined and perhaps even foxes shot—had not the Iron Duke himself tried in vain to preserve the sacred Constitution, and seen not only it, but the glass of his own windows, smashed to pieces by the mob? How many more covers would there be time to draw, or pheasants to bag, before the worst happened? But nothing did happen. Rents continued to come in, hats to be touched, while if there was any terror under such revolutionaries in office as Lords Grey, Melbourne, and John Russell, it was for paupers in Mr. Bumble's new model workhouses, and cheeky clodhoppers who tried to form trades' unions and got transported for their pains. No doubt the journey to the dogs was only postponed; the thought would add a keener zest to the joys of following them in the meanwhile. If, that is to say, the exertion of any thought at all were deemed worth the candle. Such an autobiography as that of Squire Osbaldeston is enough to show that in him and his fellow squires, no events whatever excepting those of a strictly sporting nature—not even a European war threatening the country's life—could arouse the slightest perceptible interest.

Then why, it may be asked, did the numerous and active workers who were so busily preparing the rich yield of the Victorian Age, tolerate the presence in the hive of these enormously voracious drones, who did

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nothing for their keep but buzz noisily about over the surrounding fields. It was a question that in fact had been asked, in no uncertain tones:

Wherefore, bees of England, forge  
Many a weapon, chain, and scourge,  
That these stingless drones may spoil  
The forced produce of your toil?

But the asker had been no hard-faced Radical out of an office or cotton mill, but the son of a Sussex baronet. And if one of the aforesaid Radicals had been the addressee, he would probably have wanted to answer it both ways at once:

“Get rid of them—certainly, in principle—but. . . .”

And behind that “but” lurks the whole accumulated force of the English tradition.

The French bourgeoisie had had no two minds on the matter. It was they who had engineered the Revolution and furnished it with practically all its leaders, nor had the spectacle of a blazing château, or an aristocrat about to spit into the basket, caused them the least qualms. What bond was there between them, and men of a different blood? If you were quite definitely not a gentleman, what interest had you in perpetuating the symbol of your own inferiority?

But that was not how the English middle class felt about the gentry. Just as every Napoleonic private carried a marshal’s baton in his knapsack, so every clerk on the knife-board of the city bus invested his top hat with an invisible aura of gentility. He had a profound respect for a gentleman; he longed to be a gentleman more inwardly than to be an angel; and he ended by persuading himself, and trying to persuade

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others, that he actually was a gentleman. When his ship had come home, when he had made that pile of which he was always dreaming, he would buy a house in the country; perhaps, like the grocer Jorrocks, he would hunt his own pack of hounds; perhaps a real lord would say "Haw! thankee!" for one of his cigars; perhaps he would even buy a title and blossom into a lord himself. And yet, at the present juncture, he resented keenly the fact, of which his subconsciousness did not fail to apprise him, that the actual lords and swells whose dress and whiskers he sought on his limited resources to imitate, and with whom he almost rubbed shoulders in Hyde Park on Sunday mornings, would regard him and his kind as hopeless little snobs entirely beneath their notice. Snobs themselves! How he scorned them for their airs and pretensions! How glibly could he have defied them in the spirit of our old friend Osbaldeston, as he pocketed Lord George's £200: "I beg you to understand that I consider myself quite as much of a gentleman as either you or any of the jockey club, although I have not got a title attached to my name." For as lord is to squire, so is swell established to swell aspirant.

Thus we see how profoundly the Victorian mind—and not only the Victorian bourgeois mind—was divided against itself on the subject of class distinctions. But this is not to say that it was always divided in the same proportions. Throughout the period, the ratio of independence to gentility shows a constant tendency to diminish. There is, to start with, something that might be called a middle class consciousness, proud of itself, and untinged by the desire to barter the respectability of honest trade for the pride of blood or estate.



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This was particularly strong among the nonconformist community, and among the sturdy, self-made capitalists of the industrial North. Men like John Bright and Cobden did honestly believe themselves to be the successors of the old, merchant princes, and as such, on a level with any lord in the land.

It might have been said that they were too proud to be gentlemen. It was enough to be a respectable British citizen, with top hat and frock coat all complete, sure of himself and of the progressive Liberalism by which the whole world was to be transformed into the highly profitable likeness of its workshop, England. Of such were the Mr. Bottles of Matthew Arnold and the immortal Podsnap of Dickens:

“As a so eminently respectable man, Mr. Podsnap [and how well the top hat would fit Mr. Roebuck, or Mr. Samuel Smiles, or Mr. Herbert Spencer!] was sensible of its being required of him to take Providence under his protection. Consequently he always knew exactly what Providence meant. Inferior and less respectable men might fall short of that mark, but Mr. Podsnap was always up to it. And it was very remarkable (and must have been very comfortable), that what Providence meant, was invariably what Mr. Podsnap meant.”

Now all this may be to the last degree Philistine and insular, but it is at least not snobbish. These middle class stalwarts, who were so proud of their respectability, have the same sort of solid and four square dignity that belongs to their mahogany tables and sideboards. And the fruits of that respectability were something to be proud about. Mr. Podsnap's trusteeship for Providence could at least show a very substantial

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credit balance on a final taking of accounts. It is doubtful whether any similar period of our history has delivered the goods—an expression that would have delighted Mr. Podsnap—in such honest abundance as those four decades of the bourgeois ascendancy.

It is not the pride of the British Philistine but his humility, not his respectability but his lack of self-respect, that was his undoing. For it was not enough to be himself; he must needs be perpetually posing as something that he thereby tacitly admitted to be superior to himself. And that is the whole essence of snobbery.

Never was there a happier piece of word coinage. The Victorian Age was even more distinctly one of snobs than it was of steam; you could get out of sight of a railway line, but the snob was ubiquitous. And he was almost as new as the steam engine. No doubt the germs of snobbery have existed in every age, but it was not until the Mechanical Revolution had thrown the whole system into the melting pot, that it grew to such proportions as to justify the appropriation for it of a word in the dictionary. The only pity is that it should be a word of pure contempt; a contempt curiously enough of rather snobbish antecedents, for in very early Victorian times we find “snob” used in a disparaging sense of social inferiority—“Fancy a lord like him talking to a couple of little snobs like you and me!”

But the snob, in the sense to which Thackeray has adapted the word for all subsequent usage, is by no means an utterly contemptible figure. There is a pathos about him, and even a certain streak of idealism. He might have taken his motto (and

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a good deal else besides) from the great Victorian Laureate, as:

We needs must love the highest when we see it.

It is only that to the snob all altitudes are social.

It was a romantic age, and he was an incurable romanticist. Can we wonder? The conditions of his actual existence were too often those of sheer spiritual starvation. From the ignoble drudgery of making or earning money in hideous surroundings, he longed to escape into a world of spaciousness and leisure, a life of dignity and ease, from which sordid anxieties were forever banished—the life, in fact, proper to a gentleman. Gentility accordingly became the heaven about which he wove his daydreams, and he alternately idealized its inmates and hated them with all the bitterness of jealousy.

The virus of snobbery is, however, no respecter of classes. There were, as anyone will know who has studied Thackeray's famous anatomy of snobbery, snobs royal, snobs aristocratic, snobs clerical and military. And some of the worst snobbery of all is that of the poor streets and back stairs—one has known a housemaid, just out of the board school, cut a fellow servant, old enough to be her grandmother, dead in the street—because she was the char. And if this happens now, it is certain to have happened no less then.

For the psychological kink that we call snobbery is no more than an obsessive pre-occupation with class or social distinctions, and this may affect duke or dustman. But the conditions of the time made its effects most noticeable of all among the enormously swollen and apparently all-conquering ranks of what we are com-

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pelled to lump together for want of a better term, under the unpleasantly provocative designation of middle class. That it should have become thus provocative, is the most conclusive evidence that could be adduced of the ultimate effect of snobbery in breaking down the sturdy bourgeois pride that nothing could have broken in the like of Mr. Cobden and Mr. Herbert Spencer. It has become equally snobbish for a gentleman to speak of himself as upper, or of anyone else as middle class. That there is a middle class is tacitly conceded, but it does not appear to contain any specific individuals. And the name has acquired hardly less disparaging associations than "snob" itself.

Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark is completeness itself compared with a middle-classless survey, however cursory, of the Victorian gentleman, or ideal of a gentleman. For it is the usurpation by this class of the leading part in the drama, that accounts for the gentleman-consciousness which, as we have seen, is so dominant a feature of the time.

Everybody, as the negro spiritual says, is talking of heaven; a heaven peopled, not by angels, but the sort of humanity into whose communion the aspirant would fain enter, and whose superiority, so long as he remains outside, he resents. We find this Janus-faced mood pervading all the literature of the time. Tennyson is its bard, which makes him so peculiarly the representative vehicle of the Victorian spirit. It was natural that he should be so, for though he came of a good Lincolnshire stock, that tried to make itself out even better by claiming Plantagenet antecedents, he was born and bred with a social grievance. His father had been disinherited of the family manor in favour of a

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younger son, and driven into the uncongenial drudgery of a country parsonage. In his early thirties Alfred had lost his own, and most of his family's scanty resources, by speculating in a typically Victorian project for making machine wood-carving take the place of hand. When it had all gone up in smoke, he had a nervous breakdown that nearly cost him his life. And then, very naturally, he sat down to compose *The Princess*, which is romance adapted to the requirements of a house-party in just the sort of country mansion Tennyson should, by rights, have possessed himself, and whose inmates, godlike, lay beside their nectar, or rather sat beside their teacups, far from the sordid anxieties of bulls, and bears, and impecunious poets. No wonder that the guest—for it was a real house that Tennyson had in mind—should rise up and call his host, and his host's family, blessed:

Sir Walter Vivian all a summer's day  
Gave his broad lawns, until the set of sun  
Up to the people: thither flocked at noon  
His tenants, wife and child, and thither half  
The neighbouring borough with their Institute  
Of which he was the patron. I was there. . . .

The patronage being duly performed, the sports viewed, the fire balloon sent up, and the miniature telegraph operated, the gentry are free to adjourn to the quiet of a near by Gothic abbey:

The sward was trim as any garden lawn:  
And here we lit on Aunt Elizabeth,  
And Lilia and the rest, and lady friends  
From neighbour seats.

There too the visiting poet is able to launch forth on a romance of the Middle Ages, with all the medieval

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coarseness and brutality properly eliminated, and with the sweetest infusion of song, rendered by the ladies.

Surely this were paradise enough for any one fortunate enough to achieve it, and we almost feel inclined to join ourselves in the three parting cheers that are given for Sir Walter on the return of the party from the Abbey, by the grateful burgesses and villagers.

But it is a very different matter when one does not happen to be admittted. When little Lilia, for instance, instead of being duly captivated by one's poetry, amuses herself by thinking to break a country heart, for pastime, she becomes Lady Clara Vere de Vere, for whom no contempt can be too scathing or too vocal, and who is finally dismissed with the injunction to take up useful parish work; when the squire, instead of asking one to his house, carries off one's young lady to the altar, the three cheers are turned to roars of execration. "Is it well to wish thee happy?" demands the bard of the bride:

" . . . having known me—to decline

On a range of lower feelings, or a narrower heart than mine!

As the husband is, the wife is: thou art mated with a clown,

And the grossness of his nature will have power to drag thee down."

How very different a country gentleman from the excellent Sir Walter!

The early Victorian time saw this cult of romantic gentility raised to an extraordinary pitch of extravagance. A certain Kenelm Digby, a young man of twenty-two, had, in George IV's time, burst upon the world with a book called *The Broad Stone of Honour or Rules for the Gentlemen of England*, which was a passionate plea for the revival of Christian chivalry in high places.

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So great was its success that its author was able to expand it into four volumes entitled *Godefridus*, *Tancredus*, *Morus*, and *Orlandus*. Nor was the fashion only for knights and crusaders. Barons in Rhine castles, and hidalgos of old Spain, wrapped in dark cloaks and darker mystery, were extremely popular in the drawing rooms of a century ago. The climax was reached when, in 1839, a grand tournament was organized under the auspices of Lord Eglinton, calculated to rival in splendour those of Camelot itself. There was a Queen of Beauty; there were pavilions, banners, and trappings galore; there were knights of the Golden Lion, the Burning Tower, and other titles equally romantic, to joust in the lists. There were to be a banquet and a ball to round off the proceedings. But there was also something that never appears to have marred the proceedings at Camelot—the English weather. Just as everything was in trim to start, it came on to rain cats and dogs. Vainly did the knights endeavour to joust, with the water pouring off their armour and in through the joints, and their steeds floundering in the mud. The pavilions were flooded; feast and dance were out of the question.

In more senses than one, this damped the enthusiasm for tournaments, but the apotheosis of the gentry was continued in other ways, and exploited by a clique of rising Tory politicians as the Young England movement. One of these, Lord John Manners, immortalized himself and it by the couplet:

Let laws and learning, art and commerce die,  
But spare us still our old nobility!

A sentiment calculated to excite as much decorous applause, among his fellow peers, as the traditions of

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their House permitted. For they were nothing if not in sympathy with this rebirth of themselves as an antique but purified baronage. The generation or so following Waterloo was almost as great a time of castle building as that of King Stephen; the classical dignity of the great eighteenth century mansions gave way to the shop window extravagance of Gothic-cum-Renaissance; Norman keeps, machicolated turrets, battlemented ramparts, shouted their defiance to non-existent enemies. Nor did the gentleman fail to share in the benefits of the process. He too became an idealized figure, a pattern of courtesy and chivalry and manly virtue.

There is not the least reason to suppose that this was unpopular among the great body of the middle class, who, when the gentleman was worshipped, formed the most devout part of the congregation. Even the sturdiest upholders of its early Radicalism had enough of a romantic streak in them, to make them very tender to such of the Fine Old English specimens of the breed as were not arrogantly offensive. Even Dickens, who obviously set out to deal rather more than faithfully with upper class pretensions, and whose glory, according to the oddest of Chestertonian paradoxes, it was not to be able to describe a gentleman, quite fails to keep it up in practice.

Take the instance of his Lord Frederick Verisopht in *Nicholas Nickleby*. No doubt what Dickens had intended to do with *him*! The worst of that habit, now happily discarded, of giving punning surnames, is that it gives away the novelist's own intention, and binds him down to describing not a human being, but whatever quality or humour the name happens to signify.



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Dickens's lord is obviously intended to be a mere butt, a figure of fun—the kind of fun that sturdy democrats delight in poking at the aristocracy. But Dickens was unfortunately a genius, and genius has a way of breaking through artificial restrictions, not even excepting those imposed by the author on himself. The poor dupe suddenly takes matters into his own hands; he comes out as a great and chivalrous gentleman—he is no longer Verisopht, but Greatheart. The pigeon turns on the rook, Sir Mulberry Hawk, with spirit and dignity, when that gentleman's base designs against Nicholas and his sister are openly proclaimed. He is about to forswear the cad's company forever, when a drunken insult to the lady moves him to retaliate with a blow, though Sir Mulberry is known to be a dead shot. A few hours later Lord Frederick is lying in Twickenham meadows, a "dead man, with his stark and rigid face turned up to the stars." Bayard himself did not fall more nobly.

And there is another of these name-damned gentlemen of Dickens—Sir Leicester Dedlock. He too, by rights, ought to have been and remained a pompous old fool, and nothing else. But besides being a pompous old fool, he shows himself, in the course of the story, a lovable and chivalrous old gentleman. What can be more in the true spirit of Christian knighthood, than the kindness and consideration that he constantly shows to his wife, and his loving forgiveness of her after he has made the discovery—unspeakably more shocking to one of his time than of ours—of her illegitimate child?

Dickens, in fact, not only could describe a gentleman, but also sentimentalize him. Pickwick's host, Wardle, is

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a delightful example of the old-fashioned squire as the squire likes to see himself. For really scathing treatment, we must go not to the pay-office clerk's son, who had started his career by labelling pots in a blacking factory, but to Thackeray, who had sprung from just that sort of unpretentious county society that Jane Austen pictures in her novels, and who may therefore be presumed to view the gentry from inside their pale. For the English gentleman does not really mind being called stupid; but meanness, vulgarity, and low cunning, are qualities that not the most conceited person can work into any flattering self-portrait. And when Thackeray describes a gentleman, the chances are that at least one, if not all of these characteristics, will be described too.

Take the description of Becky Sharp's first introduction to the country baronet, Sir Pitt Crawley—and compare him, I do not say with Sir Walter Vivian, but Sir Leicester Dedlock.

"A man in drab breeches and gaiters, with a dirty old coat, a foul old neckcloth lashed round his bristly neck, a shining bald head, a leering red face, a pair of twinkling grey eyes, and mouth perpetually on the grin. . . .

"Had your dinner, I suppose? It is not too warm for a drop of beer?"

"Where is Sir Pitt Crawley?" said Miss Sharp majestically.

"He, he! I'm Sir Pitt Crawley. Reklect you owe me a pint for bringing down your luggage. He, he! Ask Tinker if I aynt. Mrs. Tinker, Miss Sharp! Miss Governess, Mrs. Charwoman. Ho, ho!"

"The lady addressed as Mrs. Tinker at this moment

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made her appearance with a paper and pipe of tobacco, for which she had been dispatched a minute before Miss Sharp's arrival; and she handed the articles over to Sir Pitt who had taken his seat by the fire.

"Where's the farden?" said he. 'I gave you three halfpence. Where's the change, old Tinker?"

"There!" replied Mrs. Tinker, flinging down the coin, 'it's only baronets as cares about farthings.' "

Sir Pitt Crawley, senior, is rather above the average pleasantness of the Crawley family, and indeed of the nobility and gentry to whom Thackeray introduces us in his novels of contemporary life.

But Thackeray himself was too much of a sentimental Victorian to abstain from giving his readers one full-length portrait of the complete gentleman, without stain or flaw. This, one need hardly say, is the gallant and beloved Colonel Newcombe, whose heart, as Thackeray says in one of his most touching passages, was that of a little child. Unfortunately the same description would equally apply to the Colonel's mind. From his first appearance, when he innocently conducts his boy into an unedifying forerunner of the modern night club, and then creates a terrible scene at the singing of a naughty song, to his final exploit of wasting substance in speculation and dying on charity, he is every whit as stupid as Sir Leicester or Lord Frederick. And it shows how far we have got from the eighteenth century, that the perfect gentleman can also be depicted as the pure fool. Richardson puts forward his whole powers in the effort to display Sir Charles Grandison as an intellectual no less than a moral paragon. But we fancy that the Colonel would have found himself

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even more out of his depth in a *salon* than when he drifted into the Cave of Harmony.

But that constitutes at least one respect in which the sentimentalizers of the Victorian gentleman would seem to have kept within the strictest bounds of realism. The de-intellectualizing of the upper class had proceeded apace, since the eighteenth century, and by the middle of the nineteenth had progressed to an extent that brooks no gainsaying. There is one test that can be applied in any old country mansion that still retains its library. The shelves will be found stocked with all the literature that an eighteenth century gentleman was supposed to have at his command. And then, as we cast our eyes round the shelves, it begins to dawn on us that some time not very far on in the nineteenth century, literature, of a type fit for a gentleman's reading, must have come very nearly to an end. The Victorian owners would seem to have cared about none of these things. Where are the philosophers of the nineteenth century? where its critics and essayists? where even its historians? France has disappeared completely off the map—there is no solitary volume of Hugo or Balzac, still less of Gautier or Baudelaire, to fall into line with the serried ranks of the Voltaires and Buffons, Boileaus and Racines. At best, the evidence that the art of reading was not altogether lost in the nineteenth century, is likely to be provided by a few stray books bearing on the subject of sport, and likeliest of all, by a "Jorrock," or even a complete set of Surtees's sporting novels.

And what an account it is that Surtees, that beloved of sportsmen, gives of sporting society in those palmy days! We know that he was drawing from life, for we

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have it on the authority of Ralph Nevill, that the originals of some of his most celebrated portraits were perfectly well known. The present author has heard another Nevill, of an even older generation, who knew Surtees, tell how he used to come out on hunting days, hardly speaking to anyone, but taking stock of everything capable of furnishing material for his next book. Dean Swift himself could not have drawn a more appalling community of Yahoos than Surtees would seem to have found in the pleasant vale of Ashford—if we are really to take that for the Jorrocks country—or in the country houses to which Mr. Soapy Sponge paid his round of unwelcome visits.

Thackeray himself hardly depicted any type quite so objectionable as that of Squire Jawleyford—one of those known to be drawn from life.

“One of the rather numerous race of paper-booted, pen-and-ink landowners. He always dressed in the country as he would in St. James’s-street, and his communications with his tenantry were chiefly confined to dining with them twice a year in the great entrance hall, after Mr. Screwentight had eased them of their cash in the steward’s-room. Then Mr. Jawleyford would shine forth the very impersonation of what a landlord ought to be. Dressed in the height of fashion, as if by his clothes to give the lie to his words, he would expatiate on the delights of such meetings of equality; declare that, next to those spent with his family, the only really happy moments of his life were those when he was surrounded by his Tenantry; he doated on the manly character of the English farmer. Then he would advert to the great antiquity of the Jawleyford family,

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many generations of whom looked down upon them from the walls of the old hall. . . .”

An odd sort of companion portrait to that of Sir Walter Vivian—and Surtees, we must remember, far from being a class-hating Radical, came from an old Durham family and—we should rather gather from his writings—inclined towards the Tory standpoint. But—it may be said—here is a sportsman venting his spleen on the sort of country gentleman whose heart is in St. James’s-street, rather than the hunting field. Very well, then, let us take his portrait of a real out and out sporting peer, the Earl of Scamperdale, M.F.H., who, like Jawleyford, is known to have been drawn from life.

Here we touch an even lower depth, for Jawleyford is at least civilized, whereas his Lordship—though a past master in the pursuit of vermin—is an illiterate brute, a Squire Western without any of the Squire’s redeeming bonhomie—“stumpy and clumsy and ugly, with as little to say for himself as could well be conceived . . . a coarse, square, bull-headed looking man,” who had inherited a magnificent eighteenth century mansion, which his predecessors have filled with works of art, but who has had everything locked up or put under covers, and is content to inhabit, with a sycophant who is as great a sportsman and boor as himself, three small and ill-furnished rooms in what have been the steward’s quarters, and to subsist on such delicacies as tripe, cow-heel, and half raw beef steak. Like Mr. Hastings, two books (one for the use of the sycophant) comprise his library, the titles not specified, but certainly of a very different calibre from the Bible and Foxe’s Martyrs.

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And so on through the whole gallery of Surtees's sporting gentlemen—Sir Harry Scattercash, Sir Archibald Depecarde of Pluckwelle Park, Mr. Jogglebury Crowdey, Mr. Puffington, and the rest of them, in endless, but certainly not tedious succession. Grant that Surtees was a humorist both in the modern, and in the old sense of describing foibles or humours, his descriptions were at least near enough to the real thing for them to pass muster in the circles from which they were drawn—and that without giving the least offence. And one would certainly gather that the sporting society of early Victorian times was the very reverse of sporting in the complimentary sense. The world that Surtees describes is one of which the even beefier grandchildren of Horace Walpole's Beefs have got undisputed control, except in so far as they are preyed upon by a host of parasites and shady adventurers; a barbarous world from which every vestige of culture, and most of refinement, have been eliminated. And it is very much the sort of world that we gather, from actual records, to have provided a setting for such worthies as Osbaldeston, Ross, Mytton, and those other famous sporting characters.

This account of Surtees receives confirmation from what might well have seemed the unlikeliest of all witnesses, the great reviver of Toryism, the alien in whose leadership the country gentry—in spite of their instinctive aversion—felt bound to confide. It was in *Sybil*, one of the three great novels in which he expounds the principles of the Young England movement, that Disraeli sets beside the portraits of the Crawleys, the Scamperdales, and the Jawleyfords, his own of Lord Marney and his set. We have seen with what a sympa-

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gentlemen, do so in such a way as to make one wonder whether there are any real gentlemen left at all.

But both realists and sentimentalizers were making as well as interpreting history. The Victorian gentleman was no static or unalterable phenomenon, but like all other ingredients of the social melting pot, in process of rapid alteration. And, to a discriminating observer, it must have been very plainly a question of whether he was capable of being mended from within, before he was ended from without. For the rough and tough squires of the Mytton breed would plainly never have suited the requirements of an age that was becoming more and more consciously democratic. Mytton, for instance, when some middle class outsider presumed to address him upon terms of social equality, would retaliate with a straight left to the offending jaw. And one gathers that these gentlemen would think nothing of addressing a wayside yokel as "you fool," or "you clodhopper," just as a manservant would be "you scoundrel," and few were the squires who took a serious view of any other duties to their dependents, than those of extracting their rents, and punishing their depredations in pursuit of game.

This, as no one saw more clearly than Disraeli, was heading straight for revolution. With an enfranchised democracy in the saddle, the gentleman would continue to exist, if at all, on sufferance. Like everything else in this commerical age, it was a case of demand and supply, and it was his business to supply just that sort of gentility that was in popular demand. To put it in the most modern terms, he must acquire a new *persona*; the *persona* being the role that anyone deliberately elects to play in the drama of life, the sort of character



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he imagines for himself, and in which he exhibits himself to others.

Now the Mytton sort of *persona* may have been well enough adapted to the time when Mytton flourished. That quality of manliness, expressing itself in feats of sportsmanship, was all that people had learnt to expect of their squires. But now a new and more exacting standard was beginning to be set. It was still more or less agreed that the English heart loved a gentleman; but then the question arose—what is a gentleman? What ought he to be?

This question was now more seriously canvassed than ever before, and it was all to the good that it should have been. Even a certain amount of romantic sentimentalism was not without a healthy effect, in that it was helping to create this new ideal pattern to which every gentleman of real life would feel it incumbent on him to conform. The fine old English squire was, in reality, the fine new English squire, practising an open-handed benevolence and interesting himself in his people, in a way his father would not have dreamed of. Again, the insolence and arrogance displayed to presumed social inferiors were continuously on the decline throughout the whole of the long reign. To those of us whose memories embrace the closing years of the nineteenth century, it seems almost incredible that any medical man could submit to being informed by a menial,

“The Doctor may now bleed the Countess of Carlisle.”

Airs of this sort were not only resented, but laughed to scorn under the new order of society. Such sturdy organs of middle class opinion as the early *Punch*, waged war on them without quarter. It was no longer a mark

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of breeding to ride the high horse over all and sundry, but evidence of the lack of it. Such conduct might be fitting and proper in the foreman of a works or the manager of a shop, long after it had ceased to be becoming to a gentleman. A new principle of *noblesse oblige* was beginning to exact an equal courtesy to all sorts or conditions of men. There were old Victorian gentlemen one can remember, who would salute a cottager's wife at her gate, or even one of their own servants in the street, with a rather more studied respect than they would have displayed to a duchess.

Not but that the older spirit died hard. It is in living memory how, in some provincial hunts, if there was one negotiable jump, or perhaps gap, the leading squires of the neighbourhood would be accorded the honour of it by a waiting field, and, still more recently, of a hunt from whose membership the "townspeople" of the county metropolis were debarred. One has even heard of a great lady concluding her thanks to a rising dramatist, recently down from one of the older Universities, who had superintended her annual bazaar and theatricals, with the following gracious words:

"You have much to be grateful for. God has been very good to you. He has given you a great and rare ability—the ability to attract not only your own class, but mine."

Such survivals may and do linger on here and there, but nobody nowadays would dream of calling them either lady or gentlemanlike, whereas a hundred years ago nothing else would have been expected. Things have moved far indeed since at county halls there would be one end of the room reserved for the "quality," and the rest for the other ticket holders; or

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since a governess could be treated in a way that no modern kitchen maid would stand for a moment.

One may laugh at the gentleman-consciousness of the Victorians—for laughable it is—and deplore its considerable infusion of snobbery. Still more have we reason to regret that it is concerned almost entirely with the character, and not the mind of a gentleman, and that according to the conception of most Victorians, there was no particular reason why such a character, in full perfection, should not survive certification, on other grounds, by two doctors. This spells clear loss of that intellectualization of manners that had been the work of the Eighteenth Century, and of the Renaissance before it.

But the fact that the gentleman and his nature were being talked and thought about on all hands is one whose importance can hardly be overestimated. Now at last universal opinion is beginning to catch up with Chaucer's, to the effect that he is gentle—and he alone, who doth gentle deeds; and that to define a gentleman in any other terms is the last resort of a snob.

Of the innumerable Victorian attempts to explain the nature of a gentleman we will cite only this one, which forms as classic a landmark as Malory's description of Sir Lancelot. It is from Cardinal Newman, who—whatever we may think of his conclusions—had probably the keenest and subtlest intellect of all that great intellectual galaxy of his contemporaries.

"It is almost," he says, "a definition of a gentleman to say that he is one who never inflicts pain. . . . His benefits may be considered as parallel to what are called comforts or conveniences in arrangements of a personal nature: like an easy chair or a good fire, which

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do their part in dispelling cold or fatigue, though nature provides both means of rest and animal heat without them. The true gentleman in like manner carefully avoids whatever may cause a jolt or a jar in the minds of those with whom he is cast—all clashing of opinion, all collision of feeling, all restraint, or suspicion, or gloom, or resentment; his great concern being to make everyone at ease and at home. He has eyes on all his company; he is tender towards the bashful, gentle towards the distant, and merciful towards the absurd; he can recollect to whom he is speaking; he guards against unreasonable allusions or topics that may irritate; he is seldom prominent in conversation, and never wearisome. He makes light of favours while he does them, and seems to be receiving while he is conferring. He never speaks of himself except when he is compelled, never defends himself by a mere retort, he has no ears for slander or gossip, is scrupulous in imputing motives to those who interfere with him, and interprets everything for the best. . . .

“He is patient, forbearing, and resigned on philosophical principles; he submits to pain because it is inevitable; to bereavement, because it is irreparable, and to death, because it is his destiny. If he engages in controversy of any kind, his disciplined intellect preserves him from the discourtesy of better, perhaps, but less educated minds who, like blunt weapons, tear and hack instead of cutting clean, who mistake the point in argument, waste their strength in trifles, and leave the question more involved than they find it. . . . Nowhere shall we find greater candour, consideration, indulgence: he throws himself into the minds of his opponents, he accounts for their mistakes. He knows

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the weakness of human nature as well as its strength, its province, and its limits. . . . He is the friend of religious toleration, and that not only because his philosophy has taught him to look on all forms of faith with an impartial eye, but also from the gentleness and effeminacy of feeling which is the attendant of civilization.”<sup>1</sup>

And Newman is writing not with the object of glorifying this portrait, but to show that for a Christian to be merely a gentleman is not enough.

<sup>1</sup> From *The Idea of a University* (1852) Discourse VIII. 10.

*GENTLEMEN TO STANDARD*

HIS greatest admirer would hardly describe the English gentleman of Queen Victoria's reign as having, in the course of a considerable transformation, added perceptibly to his intellectual equipment. The spirit of the time was moving in an opposite direction; a band of zealous reformers had taken in hand those public schools, that had long ceased to be public in anything but name, or schools, in the sense of imparting scholarship, since the serious educational work was done by oligarchies of the senior boys, over whose workings and sanctions, owing to a never violated taboo on "sneaking," the teaching staff could exercise a minimum of control. The official curriculum was a soulless grind, any ostensible interest in which fell under another taboo, and which—unless it took the form of cramming for some entrance examination—amounted to so much time spent in acquiring a lifelong hatred of any kind of book knowledge.

The public school may therefore be regarded in the light of a character factory, in which the raw material of what Marx called the capitalist class was worked up into the finished product of a gentleman. Such factories were every bit as important a feature of the time as the great machine houses of the North, that were causing the statistics of British wealth and prosperity to reach hitherto incredible proportions. For this very triumph of machinery was precipitating a process of social change that might easily, if it were

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to get out of hand, end in social revolution. The upper class—never a fixed and definite body in England as it had been on the Continent—was changing its basis from solid earth to unsubstantial credit. Manners could no longer be trusted to grow like the habits of an animal, which are the immemorial form of its species. The public schools had to provide for an increasing number of pupils whose ancestral standards called for revision. Unless the work of character formation were taken deliberately in hand, the new wine would burst the old bottles and itself be spilt. The very name of gentleman would become meaningless in any sense whatever.

So the public schools, like the cotton factories, set about standardizing their product. The indifference that had allowed a Shelley or Byron freedom for following his own eccentric bent, was a thing of the past. The young gentleman must now be like all other young gentlemen; he must be broken in or broken altogether. And the inquisition by which such conformity was enforced was one of boys, who are, of all human beings, the most rigidly intolerant of deviation from herd form.

The work, from the inquisitor's or manufacturer's stand-point, was accomplished with remarkable success. A standardized product was indeed obtained, and—granting the assumption that brains were no object—had much to recommend it. Manliness, as we know, had been, in the heyday of the bucks and sportsmen, practically the whole of gentlemanliness. And it was on manliness that the new ideal was founded. The discipline to which the young idea was subjected and by which it was licked—only too literally—into shape,

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was one of athletics, which was steadily tightened up as the century waxed old. One gathers that in the *Westward Ho!* of the seventies, boys like Kipling and "Stalky" still enjoyed a certain freedom of cutting games, and developing their individual genius on their own lines. But even then, one fancies, such freedom was more or less of an anachronism.

The standard gentleman, as he emerged from the mill, was gifted with certain qualities that were, for their time, unique. In the four or five years of his rise from slave to tyrant, or fag to monitor, he had acquired gifts of both self-command and of commanding others. His experience of dealing with superiors, rivals, and underlings, in the tough commonwealth of boys, apprenticed him, as nothing else could, to the art of dealing with men.

The intensive cultivation of the team spirit, the artificial excitement that was worked up about the petty patriotisms of House and School, did at least make for the suppression of the cruder forms of egotism, and in fact of any emotional display whatsoever. It also helped not only to maintain, but even to raise, the level of gentlemanly manners; for the team spirit made it incumbent on the boy, even as old boy, to be a credit to his school, and schools were reputed more by the social than by the scholastic stamp impressed upon their pupils. The Eton boy might talk of Harrow cads, but he would willingly concede that Harrow might be more clever. It was the sort of germ by which, at Eton, one would expect cads to be infected.

Certainly the gentleman of the reformed, public school model was a pleasanter and more civilized being than the squires and Corinthians earlier in the century.



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quarter of the century, he was without a rival in dealing with natives, providing only that these were of a mentality even more primitive than his own. When the native happened to be educated, and imbued with the traditions of an ancient civilization, there might be a different tale to tell; one of blank prejudice and incomprehension.

But we must grant this to the Englishman in every walk of life; that his deficiencies in the way of conscious thought are, to some extent at least, mitigated by what we might call his capacity for thinking below the surface of his mind. He will sometimes act with a wisdom, or shrewdness, that he would be incapable of putting into words. And he would appear to share with certain animal, and even vegetable species, the capacity for acting by a sort of collective intuition; the faculty possessed by some tropical orchids of laying and executing the most far-sighted plans of which the individual plant is as unconscious as it is of everything else.

Thus we find the old English upper class, which early in the century was practically the equivalent of the landed gentry, extracting itself from what might have seemed a hopeless situation, by a strategy that would have been masterly had it been consciously thought out. There can be no doubt that if the squires had gone on for another generation on their old lines, exploiting the countryside for their sport and closing their ranks against bourgeois intrusion, they would have lost not their popularity alone, but also their estates and privileges. As it was, the bourgeois electorate was strong enough to divert the main source of landed income by withdrawing protection from agriculture. But that had been inspired more by economic dogma

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than class hatred. If the bourgeoisie, let alone the proletariat, had once been properly antagonized, the squire and his relations would soon have been sent packing.

What were the gentry, the landed gentry, going to do, to avert this catastrophe to themselves? A superficial observer might have answered, "nothing whatever." Certainly they did nothing startling. To all appearance life on their estates went complacently on in the old grooves; the hounds continued to meet at the time-honoured *rendezvous*; bags got bigger and better with each improvement of fire-arms. But what appeared to be mere marking time was really an intuitive strategy of gaining it, until enemy deserters could be lured in sufficient numbers into the camp. That strategy consisted partly in adapting the ideal of a gentleman to the requirements of the new age, and partly in extending the term so as to cover anyone in possession of capital, or receipt of a salary, who chose to assume it. Middle class respectability was thus to be, as far as possible, conciliated; middle class snobbishness was to be welcomed with open arms. Disraeli, in one of his most celebrated phrases, had declared himself on the side of the angels; every dweller in a suburban villa would shortly be able to echo, "And I too, my lords, am on the side of the gentlemen."

None of the many changes that transformed English Society during the Queen's long reign, was more remarkable than that which was accomplished in its apparently least changeable element. The type of squire who had flourished in the Mytton days, had become extinct and almost forgotten species by the time of the Jubilee. There were no doubt a fair sprink-

ling of high-handed and arbitrary magnates still surviving, but these, if one can examine their records, will usually be found to have acquired enough popular merit to permit of a certain willing indulgence. It was seldom that the big house failed to provide its quota of profit and pleasure to the neighbourhood, or the "Family" to act as unofficial purveyors of bread and circuses to the community.

Tennyson's Sir Walter Vivian was probably too rare a type when *The Princess* was written, to make the record of his proceedings in blank verse seem as banal to contemporaries as it does to us. A Sir Walter of the *fin de siècle* would only have been doing what everybody expected of a person in his position, by throwing open his park for the local fête, and probably in keeping it open permanently. Even if he had thoroughly disliked the whole business, he would no more have plucked up courage to refuse, than to have warned the hunt off his land, or done any other of the things that are not done. The traditional part of the fine old English gentleman was more faithfully rendered in the Norfolk jacket than it ever had been in trunk hose or under a wig. It was also safe of a more appreciative audience; for it was what all the critics, from Tennyson downwards, had taught the public to expect.

It is as natural that an age of increasing ugliness should wish to preserve its living, as its dead monuments. The squire was a benevolent and picturesque feature of the landscape, and nothing better was likely to come into his place. As a matter of fact, an ever increasing proportion of landowning families were not old, or even necessarily English, by the end of the century.

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For a run of atrocious summers in the late seventies precipitated the disaster that unchecked competition from overseas had been threatening to the landed interest. Rents slumped, often by half, and there was little tendency to recover. Unless the landowner had something else to fall back upon; unless, for instance, he was lucky enough to be able to levy tribute on the expansion of some neighbouring town, or the millions of a Transatlantic father-in-law, the problem of keeping up his position, on a reduced income, became more and more helpless. And there was an ever increasing horde of newcomers, who were drawing lordly dividends from the proceeds of business, and who reckoned nothing of running an estate at a loss, if they could enjoy the appertaining dignity. The fine old English gentleman might well owe his gentility to fine old Scotch whisky, and his finery to speculative finance—instances were not unknown of his passing on from a stately home of England to one of her state jails.

The influx of new blood produced surprisingly little change. This sort of thing was thoroughly in the English tradition. The Tudor age had seen something very similar after the share out of the monasteries. Those of the older gentry who were left on the land were fully capable of dealing with the situation, and even turning it to their own advantage. They still controlled the right of admission to the mystic fellowship of the county set, and they had no idea of selling it except on their own terms. The first purchasers, often with strange accents and uncouth manners, found these terms extremely onerous. They certainly included munificent contributions to party, sporting, and charitable funds, besides a lavish hospitality. Even so

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the new entrant was apt to feel himself tolerated rather than welcomed inside the pale.

All this was altered in the next generation. The son and heir would in all probability have been passed through the mill of a public school education, finished off at Oxford, Cambridge, or Sandhurst, and standardized to the accepted pattern of a gentleman. Neither in accent, manner nor outlook, would there be anything to distinguish him from the scion of the oldest established family in the county. But, with his status still not quite assured, and perhaps conscious of his father's social deficiencies, he would feel it more than ever incumbent on him to conform to the minutest letter of the unwritten code; to do everything that is done, and leave undone everything that is not done. Any germ of individual eccentricity that the public school had failed to suppress, would need to be ruthlessly sterilized. His gentility, his standard gentility, was his social sheet anchor. He must sport his school character like his school tie, and with as little variation. Not for him the pranks of a Mytton, still less the liberties of a Shelley!

The countryside was also less affected by the transition than might have been imagined. No doubt there was genuine regret about the Family leaving the Hall, but the new family, if it were prepared to function on the old lines, and distribute its favours with a sufficiently lavish hand, might soon be accepted for what it was worth to the neighbourhood. The tradesman would joyfully honour the coming-of-age of a prospective customer who would not bother to compare the prices on his bills with those of the market; the recipients of benefits would display a proper sense of gratitude for

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favours to come; and when the squire came to be an officer in a crack regiment or master of the local pack, the family at the Hall was as much the Family as ever. Of course it did not always work as smoothly as this. It often took some time for the owners of newly acquired wealth to realize that with an estate you purchased duties as well as pleasures. But the habit of doing what was done was ingrained in the public school product, and the requirements of keeping up a position were too much of common form to be permanently evaded.

Meanwhile what was practically a new order of gentility had been springing up in the dormitory suburbs of London and the big industrial centres. It was the growth of these towns without burgesses, the development of this half and half sort of existence, that sealed the doom of the old independent, middle class. The suburban rows and streets of newly built villas—a type of architecture that had inspired Macaulay to something like a *Nunc Dimittis*—were nothing if not genteel. They had none of the dingy respectability of such houses as that inhabited by Mr. Scrooge, the knocker of which had, through the murk of a London Christmas Eve, been transformed into the features of his late partner, Marley.

The solid respectability of the old city-dwelling bourgeoisie, the Pickwicks and Nicklebys, the Podsnaps and Bottleses, was not the supreme ideal of the suburbs. To be a respectable citizen was nothing or less than nothing, if you lacked the hallmark of gentility. The society of Wimbledon or Upper Tooting was a perfect microcosm of Society with a big S. It was a society almost entirely run by its womenfolk, since they constituted the only section of the villa population who

could fairly be classed as resident, except at week-ends. Until the arrival of the evening train from the City, those of them who could afford to turn the bulk of their housework over to servants, had nothing to occupy or kill their time except a strenuous competition in gentility. It was the vaunt of Acacia Row to be more select than Aspidistra Terrace; it was the pride of *Mon Abri* to have nothing in common with the commonness of *Chatsworth Nook*.

Here every action of life was expected to be absolutely true to form—the good form of the best society. The slightest nonconformity was certain to be brought to the notice of an informal but highly efficient Cheka, that dealt with those obnoxious to it by a process of social liquidation.

Under these circumstances it was a matter of vital importance for everyone to be apprised of the minutest details of the model to be imitated. For of all social crimes there was none worse than ignorance. The unwritten code of the best society was studied and elaborated and glossed upon as meticulously as that of Moses in the Pharisaic heyday. The habits of the Very Best People were invested with an almost divine authority, and the reputation accruing from social intercourse with any of them was so priceless an asset, that it is no wonder if feminine frailty should have succumbed rather frequently to the temptation to claim it, in and out of season, on the slenderest of grounds.

Such an estimate is easily combated on the score of its being partial or deliberately satirical. Certainly the universal trend of late Victorian satire is to represent the suburbans as consumed by a desire to achieve the

vener of gentility after the purest standards of Belgravia, and to stick at no lengths of snobbishness in its pursuit. But we have more conclusive, though circumstantial evidence, in what is really one of the most remarkable developments of the modern age, a lavishly produced magazine press catering openly to this besetting weakness, if we may so style it, of the genteel middle class mind. What, we may well ask, would our convenient friend, the Visitor from Mars, make of these publications and the type of mentality for which they cater? He would turn over page after page of photographic reproductions of aggressively commonplace people amusing themselves in even more commonplace ways. He would enquire in amazement what conceivable motive could induce these tens of thousands of Terrafirmans to part with their weekly sixpences and shillings, for the pleasure of contemplating stringy women in tweeds stumping about racecourses, or self-conscious hobbledahoys sitting out with phlegmatic partners at West End dances. If a countess had stood on her head in the paddock, or a deb poured the contents of a champagne bottle down the neck of her boy friend, even a Martian could understand a certain interest in the photographic record; but here not the countess, but the first principle of terrestrial journalism has been turned upside down. Only the expected incidents of a prescribed routine are allowed to rank as news. The duller the people, the deadlier their proceedings, the greater the eagerness to behold them—an eagerness guaranteed, year in and year out, to yield a golden harvest to its panders.

A phenomenon so extraordinary might have given our visitor to doubt whether this new world, in which



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he had landed up, were one in which effects followed from causes in the sane Martian way. It would be too much to expect him to grasp that this Society ritual is the centre of a ritual cult; and that in these publications the devout reader can learn the way, and delight in the law, of the Best People. It was in a like spirit that, in an age of different faith, the Golden Legend of the Saints had held monkish audiences entranced.

It has been necessary to dwell upon this aspect of suburban life, because in no other way could we understand on what lines the conception and ideal of an English gentleman have evolved within living memory. In early Victorian times, though the term was certainly in middle class vogue—as who should say “that old gentleman,” if George IV’s question had been asked about anyone—“Is he a gentleman?” the word would have been certainly understood in a more exclusive significance. By the end of the century the circle had been widened to include the whole middle class except those engaged in retail trade, or drawing salaries below a certain level. Above that it was all ladies and gentlemen, one class, one code, one pattern of living, as far as assumption and admission could make it so.

Nor need it be assumed that the change from middle class independence to suburban gentility was a bad thing in itself. The sort of life that Dickens loves to describe—fascinating as it is to behold in retrospect through his glasses—is hardly one to which many of us would want the clock put back. It must have been ugly, ungenial, and comfortless, to a degree we can hardly realize. The suburban villa, however flimsy and pretentious, did offer a prospect of life less doggedly Philistine than did those streets of funereal austerities,

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with their smoke-grimed brick, and rank and file of rectangular windows, with a few slatternly drudges to sweep the floors, and frequently drunken cooks to prepare the heavy and greasy meals.

The suburbans were making an effort, with their limited lights and even more limited resources, to raise their standard of living to the best attainable. Was it not natural that they should seek the best model for imitation? And where else could they be expected to look than to that Society in which the art of living was studied and practised under the most advantageous conditions, and by those who had the reputation of being its masters?

The word snobbishness is, after all, one-sided. It denotes only the shadow side of aspiration—in itself a noble thing. That an office worker, with an income that forces him to do everything on the cheap, should want to bring refinement and beauty into his own, and his family, life; that he should think of himself as a gentleman, and pride himself on possessing the manners of a gentleman; these things are not to be written down to his discredit. That, handicapped by lack of resources no less than of guidance, he and his should fall into caricaturing their own ideal, and exhibit themselves in a frequently ridiculous aspect, is no doubt inevitable. Laughter is a healthy tonic, particularly to anyone so capable of appreciating a joke at his own expense as an Englishman. But let it be a tonic, and not—as it can be when undiluted with sympathy—a corrosive poison.

Regard that figure of the suburban gentleman—the product, if you like to put it that way, of half a century of snobbery—and compare him with the most admired

products of patrician breeding in early or pre-Victorian times. Which of us, with the choice between being spirited back through time and asked to drink himself under the table with Squire Mytton, or to share the tripe and cowheel of Lord Scamperdale, would not—except possibly just for the sake of the experience—prefer to stop quietly in the present, and be entertained by the Montmorency Smythes of Surbiton, or even the Binkses of Balham? I believe he would find a cleaner, a more intelligent, a more refined, and—to sum it in a word—a more gentlemanly atmosphere, than any he would be likely to recover by that journey through time. I would go further, and challenge these ancient worthies on their strong suit of sportsmanship. I am reasonably certain that no Smythe or Binks would stoop to such sharp practice on the cricket field as that of Lord Frederick Beauclerk, such dirty work on a race-course as that of Squire Osbaldeston, or such hooligan cruelty to domestic animals as that of Captain Horatio Ross.

Nor must it be forgotten that it was largely, if not mainly, from this suburban population, that there arose a type of gentleman of whom, though it was his humour to describe his status as temporary, it is written that his name liveth for evermore.

That is the other aspect of the suburban picture, and we must be as much on our guard against falling into sentimental, as into satirical, exaggeration. This at least we can assert without danger of either; that the desire of the surburbans to achieve gentility, by whatever means it was pursued, was rewarded to this extent, that the difference between villa gentleman and country house gentleman was reduced ever closer to

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vanishing point. More and more were parents able to afford their sons a public school education; and the public school was a factory capable of turning out its product to a standard, no matter what the origin of its material. And the cheaper schools, that formed a middle class between public and board, followed the tendency of the age in working with their limited resources to reproduce the same process. This they did with an ever increasing measure of success, and their product, if not wholly undistinguishable in accent and manner from that which had cost ten times as much to produce, was a surprisingly plausible imitation. It also, in the post-war age, might well be better adapted for success in the commercial activities in which all grades impartially competed.

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GRANT, then, that the standardization of the gentleman was successfully achieved, and that the abolition of the second class on the railways did but register the virtual disappearance of a middle class from the social order, so that now there were only capitalists and proletariat; those who were addressed individually as Esq. on envelopes, and those others who, though they might be addressed as gentlemen collectively from the platform, in private aspired to nothing more imposing than Mister: grant that for every authentic specimen of the English gentleman a century ago there are at least a score today, in no way demonstrably inferior in that which makes a gentleman: grant all this, and there yet remains the question of whether the standard itself is the best attainable, or the best that might reasonably have been expected.

Let us go back to our fundamental requirements—the gentleman must have strength; that strength must be perfected in gentleness. In the first of these we may give our English gentleman something like a full mark as he is today; in the second he at least passes at the head of the European list. Nobody, not even his worst detractor, has ever accused him of want of courage; the public schools have provided him with an unsurpassed training in will power. And for gentleness, though the public school product may be a long way from the highest pattern of Christian chivalry, he has been taught an instinctive hatred of boasting and

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bullying. Imagine any Englishman having part or lot in such nightmare cruelty as that which is almost a religious duty in the Totalitarian tyrannies overseas. Imagine—to take one of the mildest instances—a girl being dragged through English streets, by youths in uniform, from one public resort to another, to be exhibited with every circumstances of insult and humiliation, for the crime of having been seen walking out with a Jew! Such things, to use the much abused English phrase, would rank emphatically in the category of “It isn’t done.”

But this gentleness is probably at least as much innate as acquired. It has deep roots in the English nature, and none deeper than in that of the British working man. That is why it has been said that His Majesty’s best ambassador is called Thomas Atkins. I am not sure whether the most magnificent tribute ever paid to the British army is not contained in a request, shortly after the armistice, from the British general commanding on the Rhine, that steps should be taken by the Home Authorities towards feeding the civil population, as the men were parting with their own rations in such quantities as to leave them undernourished.

Strength then, and gentleness, we may concede both to the reality and ideal of an English gentleman. The third requirement, which is that of finish or urbanity of manners, leaves more scope for debate. This has seldom been reputed his strongest point, even at the best of times, or one in which he could bear comparison with his French equivalent. During the greater part of the nineteenth century, the Englishman rather gloried in his lack of French polish. But the manliness

in which he also gloried was characterized, in France, as *la brutalité anglaise*. One can only say that in this respect there has been a definite and substantial improvement. Bluffness and roughness are no longer regarded in the light of social assets; the use of abuse and invective as the better part of persuasion has been steadily going out of social, and literary, vogue. Since brutality has been exalted to the summit of virtues on the greater part of the Continent, it has been almost forgotten that it has ever been associated with the name of Englishman. But that is a very different thing from claiming that, by the standards of even contemporary Paris, the English gentleman can be acquitted of the long-standing charge of provincialism.

This cannot be dissociated from the fourth and final requirement of the gentleman, that his strength of character should be matched with a corresponding strength of intellect. It is here that we come up against the main and besetting weakness both of the reality and the ideal.

To put it bluntly, the typical English gentleman of the Victorian heyday was what Matthew Arnold called him—a barbarian. And it was in this barbarian image that the public schools had standardized the type of gentleman they themselves aimed at producing—a manly, open-air type, with an infusion of muscular Christianity, but the very opposite of an intellectual. It was tacitly assumed that the nation wanted anything but brains in its leaders, nor was that assumption unwarranted. In the very melodrama, beloved of the people, it was always the villain who was the fox, always the hero who was the ass.

There never failed, however, throughout the Queen's

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reign, some striving, in high places, after a culture in being. The dinner party continued to flourish, and though the Victorian dinner was apt to be in more senses than one, a heavy affair, there were hostesses, like Lady Dorothy Nevill, who had the art of making the conversation sparkle even more than the champagne, while the race of brilliant talkers was kept alive through the mid part of the century in such survivors as Disraeli's friend, Bernal Osborne, who held forth *at* people, in the English, rather than conversed *with* them, in the French, style.

And then, in the eighties, the dazzling personality of Oscar Wilde, flashed across the skies of Mayfair. Here was surely the dawn, here the herald, of a new Renaissance. This amazing young Irishman seemed capable not only of defying, but actually exorcizing the demon Philistine. That one who could blaspheme the sacred ritual of foxhunting and describe its devotees as "the unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable," and who had so little of the public school spirit, that when asked to walk across Grosvenor Square, he languidly hailed a hansom, on the ground that he never walked; that such a man could achieve lionization on his reputation as a poet, a conversationalist, and even an aesthete, shows that there was a new spirit astir for the humanization of Society. It was powerful enough to make itself felt in those imitative societies of at least the richer suburbs, where the aesthetic craze became a stock joke of the comic press.

Nor was this sunflower and blue china aestheticism the only promise of renaissance. It was in 1886 that George Curzon, a young man whose combined wealth of talents and income already marked him out for a



great career, was able to note that Society was, at present, passing through a stage of worshipping intellect. There was, in fact, quite a galaxy of talented young people, who seemed destined to provide the light and leadership for which the nation was looking, in the new Tory phase on which—thanks largely to the foresight of Disraeli—it was beginning to enter.

For Disraeli had had the genius to perceive that democracy, instead of opening the floodgates of revolution, could, if taken boldly into alliance, give back to a reconstituted upper class all, and more than all, it had lost, through the triumph of a bourgeois Liberalism. The English worker was a sentimentalist by nature; humour that side of him, and he would never dream of becoming a revolutionary. Dazzle him with the glamour of Empire; satisfy him with instalments of social reform; and he would rather prefer to entrust his destinies to magnates like Lord Salisbury, who occupied too high a position for human frailty to be perceptible, than to people of his own class, whose weaknesses he understood only too well. He had a profound, instinctive desire for the leadership of the type of gentleman who was a gentleman, if only for the reason that so long as things continued to run fairly comfortably in the accustomed grooves, he was only too glad to leave the business of running them in reliable hands, without the bother of being made to take thought and initiative about them himself.

But the continuance of this simple faith was obviously dependent not only upon the willingness of the masses to follow the leadership of presumed gentlemen, but on the capacity of the said gentlemen to assume the functions of leadership. "Deserve my confidence, Sir,"

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as George II once said to Pitt, "and you shall have it." No doubt the public school system had instilled the gift of leadership admirably—up to a point. The English gentleman was unsurpassed as a figurehead; no one was better qualified to captain a cricket team, or hunt a pack of hounds—this latter, indeed, being a capacity in which the higher ranks of the nobility shone far more conspicuously than in any form of public service. But the successful conduct of affairs of state is apt to demand intellectual qualities of a rather higher order. And though, in normal times, things may be muddled along somehow, or run by subordinates, sooner or later lack of directing brains will bring its nemesis of disaster, and there will be no more question of blind faith in blind guides.

Disraeli, then, had given my lords and gentlemen their chance. The only question was—were they capable of supplying from among their own ranks, the minimum of intelligence required for taking it? For awhile it looked as if they might indeed be in the way of putting their house—or rather its upper story—in order. There was a real enthusiasm abroad both for beauty and intellect, of a kind that had not been seen since the great days of Holland House. There were at least two promising nuclei of an upper-class intelligentsia. One of these centred round the personality, and in the country house, of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, a belated member of the glorious fellowship of English eccentrics of culture. It is in keeping that he should have married a grand-daughter of Byron, for he himself would have been thoroughly in his element at Byron's own side, among the English champions of Greek independence and European liberty. As it was, he combined a Toryism

of the oldest home vintage with a furious championship of every native race or patriot abroad who harboured a grievance against the British Empire. He was, above all, a crusader in the cause of Egypt against the British occupation, and used to signify this by clothing himself in the costume of the desert. He was, besides, a poet of rare distinction, a breeder of Arab horses, and a very distinguished and cultured gentleman. His seat in Sussex, Crabbet, became the meeting place of an informal club, at which a group of brilliant young men, the rising hopes of English Toryism, used to exchange ideas—until their host's own exuberance of Anglophobia proved too shocking for their Tory susceptibilities to stomach any longer.

The personnel of the Crabbet Club, thus depleted, gravitated towards an even more informal clique, of both sexes, that got nicknamed—though not by itself—the Souls. This, though it was never more than a mutual and spontaneous attraction of kindred spirits, was the most hopeful approach in modern times to a revival, in the governing class, of that leadership of culture that it had exchanged, in the early years of the nineteenth century, for one of field sports. The Souls were fully confident of their ability to recover the one without forfeiting the other. They would gallop as recklessly as Mytton himself—men and women alike—to witness the dismemberment of their unsavoury quarry, and then, if they returned with bones intact, devote the evening to the quest of intellectual beauty.

It was an heroic effort to achieve what was essentially impossible. It did, for an all too brief time, hold out the prospect of London Society, which was lifted on high for all other genteel society to copy, setting up

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a new ideal of what constituted a gentleman, or—for that matter—a lady; an ideal in which every side of the personality should be equally honoured, aesthetic and intellectual no less than moral. This would, of course, have involved a complete reconstruction of the standard for a gentleman that was being enforced in the public schools.

It was wildly beyond the bounds of possibility that the conjunction of a few exceptional spirits should effect such a revolution. The only wonder is how, at this particular juncture, such a galaxy as that comprising Curzon, Balfour, George Wyndham, Cust, and the rest of them—not forgetting the two brilliant Tennant sisters, one of them now Lady Oxford and Asquith—could ever have been born of conditions so prohibitive of intellectual eminence. That is too complicated a problem for the solution to be sought here. It is enough that such a conjunction did occur, but that it showed no tendency whatever to perpetuate itself, or to be repeated. There was nothing that could be called a movement started by the Souls. They just came together and drifted apart, as individuals. Only their own souls could they deliver.

Whatever worship of intellect there may have been in Society was of all too short duration. It is doubtful whether, at the best, it covered more than a very limited circle. There was scarcely a ripple on the vast mental stagnation of the country sets, and it was from these that Society was recruited. The aesthetic cult came to an ignominious end, when Oscar Wilde was tried and jailed for a then unmentionable offence. Poor Wilde! His imagination had conceived of a society consisting of charming and talented people, mostly

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with handles to their names, gifted with exquisite taste, and talking in a perpetual fire of epigrams. In his plays, in his one novel, he exhibited such a world, in which Lord This and the Honourable That basked in an exquisitely sophisticated leisure, or trod the primrose path to the strains of such classical music as Oscar's not too selective ear was capable of appreciating. For he imparted an imaginative exaltation, such as only an Irish snob can, to his love of aristocrats. Like Peer Gynt, who in the hall of the Troll King, was capable of accepting bovine and porcine grotesques for ravishing Princesses, so was Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde capable of transfiguring the sort of lord with whom he actually attained communion, into the likeness of his ideal. He dreamed of Lord Charming and he found . . . Lord Queensberry. And Lord Queensberry broke him.

The whoop of holy exultation with which Society, and the great British public, acclaimed the bursting of the scandal, was significant of more than the vindication of a sexual taboo. It was a jubilant proclamation that the Philistines had been right after all, that the craze for culture and aestheticism had been essentially vicious and decadent, and that the clean limbed, clean minded, public school product was the man for the Empire's money. A more intensive cult of manliness than ever was now abroad, coupled with the strong, silent Englishman of repellent manners, but heart of gold, shouldering the White Man's Burden in distant climes.

There would be no more talk about society worshipping intellect, no more question of foxhunters blossoming into Souls. Nor was the fate of those of the

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Souls themselves, who passed on into the sphere of high politics, such as to encourage a repetition of the experience. There was George Wyndham, who so applied his genius to the age-long problem of Anglo-Irish relations as discover the key to its solution, and was hounded from office for his pains and replaced by an almost ludicrously typical West country squire, in the shape of honest Walter Long. There was Curzon, who would certainly have been Prime Minister but for his persistent reputation of being a "superior person"—in other words, a highbrow. And Balfour himself, who became Prime Minister, could never overcome the handicap of his reputation for intellectual subtlety, and was finally driven from the leadership of his party by a slogan abbreviated to B.M.G., of which the real interpretation was not so much Balfour as "Brains must go!"

England was finally convinced, it would seem, that brains were no qualification for a gentleman, and that to be sound, a man must not be over subtle. Terms denoting an overplus of intellect, such as "brainy" and "highbrow," were frankly opprobrious. The attitude of the country set, of the army, of society, and the public generally, was not very different in principle from that of Caesar to Cassius:

He thinks too much, such men are dangerous.

As for culture, it would be a long time before it would cease to be associated with long-haired aesthetes of perverse morals. And when that died out, it was discovered that the Germans were devotees of Kultur, a fact quite sufficient to account, in the eyes of many honest Englishmen, for their addiction to baby-killing and poison gas.

And yet—could it be said that this leadership of gentlemen, standardized to the public school pattern, was such as to demonstrate that character is enough in itself to justify the neglect of intellect? Faith in that leadership received a rude jar when the British army, almost entirely officered and run by gentlemen on the most traditional lines, went forth to battle against an undisciplined horde of Dutch farmers, who had nothing gentlemanly about them, but possessed a great deal of native shrewdness and cunning. From the high command downwards the record of British leadership was one of blundering, brainlessness, and lack of initiative, redeemed only by physical courage, and the power of personal command. The tide of humiliating defeat was only turned when the Government, under Balfour's inspiration, placed in command two soldiers who had been fortunate enough to have escaped the mill—Lord Kitchener having been educated in France, and Lord Roberts, though he had had a year in the Lower School at Eton, having gone to Sandhurst at fourteen, and thence into the service of John Company in India.

The lesson was repeated on a vaster and more tragic scale in the Great War. The British officer could die like a hero, and more—he could inspire his men to follow him into any shambles in which his commanders might choose to immolate them. But the British higher leadership was at best capable of achieving a pedestrian competence, and at worst—of a Passchendaele or Gallipoli. If we wish to find the authentic touch of genius displayed by any British commander, we shall seek in vain among officers and gentlemen of the traditional stamp, but we shall find it, clear and

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unmistakable, in the day boy of a cheap school—who even so thought his schooling sheer waste of time—who described himself as bereft of class, and who gravitated by choice to the society of the barrack room—Lawrence of Arabia.

The really amazing thing about the British faith in gentlemanly leadership is that it should have survived whatever disillusionment the war might have been expected to bring in its train, survived the coming of a universal franchise and the unchecked triumph of democratic ideals—and not only survived but emerged stronger than ever. Who would have predicted that the Post-War era would, save for transient interludes, see the country entrusting its destinies to such enormous Tory majorities as Disraeli would never have dared to dream of; that a seat in rural England should be as safe for the nominees of the gentry as it ever had been in the days of the rotten boroughs; that in time of national crisis the country should have sought safety in a veritable Cavalier Parliament!

None of the things that in a democratic age might have been expected to happen, have happened. Not only has an unreformed House of Lords continued to function, in much the old way, for a generation, in spite of the Parliament Act, but the social importance of a Peer shows no perceptible tendency to diminish—in some ways rather to increase. The stunt press, itself dominated by aristocrats of a sort, has stunted nothing so strenuously as the aristocracy. There is no more effective headline than “Baronet’s Niece in Motor Accident,” or “Cat for Mayfair Man.”

Society continues to flourish in the dazzling limelight



that is concentrated on it, and contrary to a commonly received opinion, shows the tendency to become more, rather than less, exclusive. The idea that an aristocratic hostess will allow any parvenu or outsider to figure on her dance lists by a mere money qualification, is one that will always be propagated by a certain type of novelist—but it is the very reverse of the truth. The *cachet* conferred by such an invitation makes it possible for the Duchess of A, or Lady Augusta B., to be as particular in the choice of her guests, as Lady Catherine de Burgh, and, on occasion, to fall, like heaven's amazing thunder, upon even the most fashionable of gate-crashers.

In the country districts, particularly those beyond the limits of the London dormitory or week end area, the social atmosphere has altered surprisingly little. The personnel of the county set may have suffered change, but its spirit endures. The prestige of family is still very great, though asserted in less arrogant forms than those of Victorian days, and not infrequently exploited for whatever it can be made to yield in cash. That, in fact, is the principal change in the ideal of a gentleman during the present century. In the old days he was supposed to be above sordid money considerations; though as a matter of fact he might not turn a hair at feathering his nest by unblushing corruption or grinding the faces of his tenants, and Shylock himself could hardly have improved on the methods by which the fortunes of some of the noblest English families have been built up through successive generations. But these things were hedged with a certain dignity that was quite discarded in the new age. Daughters of noblemen would not, for a trifle of pin money,

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have given their names and portraits to testimonials for cheap commercial products they would never have dreamed of using, nor would their fathers have taken commissions for touting shoddy among their friends and acquaintances. It is, however, an old proverb that hungry dogs will eat dirty dinners, and when the cost of keeping up a position is in chronic excess of income, one cannot afford to be over particular about the means.

But take him for all in all, the popularity of the English gentleman, like that of royalty, has probably never stood so high as at the present day. This may be partly accounted for by the fact that this popularity has been more sedulously courted than ever before. It is the *métier* of a gentleman to exhibit himself to the world as the model of a good fellow. He no longer goes about flaunting his contempt for inferiors and snubbing middle class attempts at familiarity. He has a smile and a good word for everyone, and he has been straitly conditioned to a horror of giving himself airs under any circumstances. At the same time, he has been taught to practice the difficult art of maintaining his dignity without any of its former aids and trappings, in the spirit of Polonius's advice to Laertes:

Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.

As an example of this new spirit in action, perhaps I may be allowed to cite the instance of a concert, given a few months ago by one of the crack cavalry regiments, now mechanized, of the British army. One of the best items of an excellent programme was a series of life-like but satirical impersonations, by one of the sergeants, of various regimental celebrities, including several

of the officers, and ending up with the Colonel, who was sitting in the front row laughing heartily at the whole performance. And yet it would be safe to say that the discipline in that particular regiment is unsurpassed by that of any unit in the world, and probably greatly superior to what it was in the good old days when it was enforced by horrible language and the use of the cat o' nine tails.

The cult of the gentleman in England has, beyond a shadow of a doubt, not only survived the vicissitudes of the modern age, but, both in extent and intensity, shows every tendency to increase. This is a fact that all of us, Tory or Liberal, Fascist or Bolshevik, have got to face, whether we welcome or deplore it. For there are certain points of view from which it may be held deplorable, to the last degree. No doubt whatever it is a factor making for social stability, or at least for continuity. Those who want a complete and bloody liquidation of what they call the capitalist, in order to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat, meaning that of the revolutionary boss who proves tough enough to liquidate all his fellow liberators, have got to start by making an end not only of the gentleman, but of the conduct and manners of a gentleman. This is equally the case when the dictator professes to stand for some system of militant nationalism, or national socialism, or whatever the fancy name of it may be.

The very first, and indispensable, requirement of such systems, is the conversion of all men into obedient and homogeneous units, whose actions, and the springs of whose actions, can be perfectly controlled and calculated in advance. Only the first requirement of a

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gentleman, strength, is by any means admissible under this system, and that only on condition of being completely amenable to control, not from within, but from without. But the second requirement, gentleness, is sheer counter-revolution. The gentle Bolshevik, the gentle Nazi, is a contradiction in terms. He is an instrument for tough work, the tougher the better, and no conscience about it. To be sorry for the Jew, merciful to the bourgeois, fair to the foreigner, is a plain case for liquidation. It is not without its significance that the gentleman, like the Christian, is hardly less discouraged in Germany than he is in Russia. As for his manners, their implied recognition of human dignity is enough to rule them out. Totalitarian manners may have a certain comradely heartiness, but it is the heartiness of the bully, ready to explode in a good, hearty laugh at the spectacle of efficiently accomplished frightfulness. The utterances of dictators, or of their innumerable mouthpieces, seldom vary from a drumfire barrage of threats, invective, and brutal discourtesy, towards any person or people with which there may be the least shadow of a dictated difference. And it is these conductors who set the tone of the orchestra.

Those—and they are many—who see the only salvation of humanity in systems of this kind, will have no use for the gentleman, or the ideal of a gentleman. And the cult of this ideal in England will rightly appear to them as a main obstacle in the way to the world-triumph of their cause.

But there are others who, for this very reason, derive from the gentleman, and that cult of the gentleman which is peculiarly English, the least forlorn of their

hopes of saving what is left of human civilization from the horror that threatens to overwhelm it. But even so, they can hardly avoid certain doubts and misgivings. Is their champion fully equipped to stand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand? Has he taken to himself the whole armour of a gentleman? Can he have provided for the heart and the rest of the body, and taken no thought for the head? Courage, gentleness, self-effacement, the gift of command—are these enough by themselves? And can any measure of them atone for the lack of brains, and that standardization of character which is the first step to the totalitarian abyss?

These questions I need not attempt to answer. Nor shall I go further than the bare statement of another, that must be in the minds of some—if there be any—who have followed me thus far. What prospect is there of cutting loose the ideal of a gentleman from its last associations with class, and finding the true reply to a slave state composed entirely of Robots and human machine parts, in a free community of gentlemen and ladies, with the appertaining manners and dignity, recruited impartially from mansion and cottage, from mine and office and factory—an all inclusive upper class, a social order in which, despite every difference of function and personality, none shall be greater or less than another, none before or after another?

It is a question that raises too many others, and the discussion of which is provocative of too violent passions, to be more than asked.

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## THE MAKING OF A GENTLEMAN

thetic touch Disraeli could portray the traditionally wicked nobleman in the person of Lord Hertford (or Monmouth). But there is nothing splendid about the wickedness of Lord Marney, who is merely base and disgusting, as mean towards his mother as he is skinflint to his cottagers; who is very pleased to make the biggest profit he can out of his game after a big shoot; who enjoys foisting on his less distinguished guests claret that is on the wane, or making them praise Burgundy that he knows to be corked; who has, in short, "all the petty social vices, and none of those petty social weaknesses which soften their happiness or their hideousness." And the whole point about Lord Marney and his friends, is that they are not individual freaks, but typical of a state of things that is dividing the country into what are virtually two nations, the same two that Karl Marx called the capitalist and the proletariat, doomed to wage a war of mutual extermination. There is only this difference between the two Jewish thinkers in their attitude to the gentleman—Marx counselled his extermination (as a mob of intolerably provoked workers does indeed account for Lord Marney), and Disraeli his reform. Give us, he might have said, gentlemen in fact as well as in name, and the people will follow their leadership.

It will be observed that the English gentleman in the conventional, as opposed to the ideal sense, comes in for by the far the most scathing treatment from those who, by birth or adoption, may be presumed to belong to his own ranks. Middle class Radicals like Dickens, who set out to denigrate, end by sentimentalizing him; foxhunting enthusiasts like Surtees, Young England propagandists like Disraeli, describing gentlemen to